

The End of Water: Is Drought the New Normal?

ALSO: The Father of the Internet on Its Future PG.27

& Tesla's Next Revolution PG.16

POPULAR SCIENCE

AUGUST 2015



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passengers and...a bar

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Volume 287 No. 2



DISPATCHES FROM THE FUTURE

Ten of the brightest minds in science fiction imagine how we will live—on Earth and beyond—in the decades and centuries to come.

PAGE 50

08
CONTENTS
15

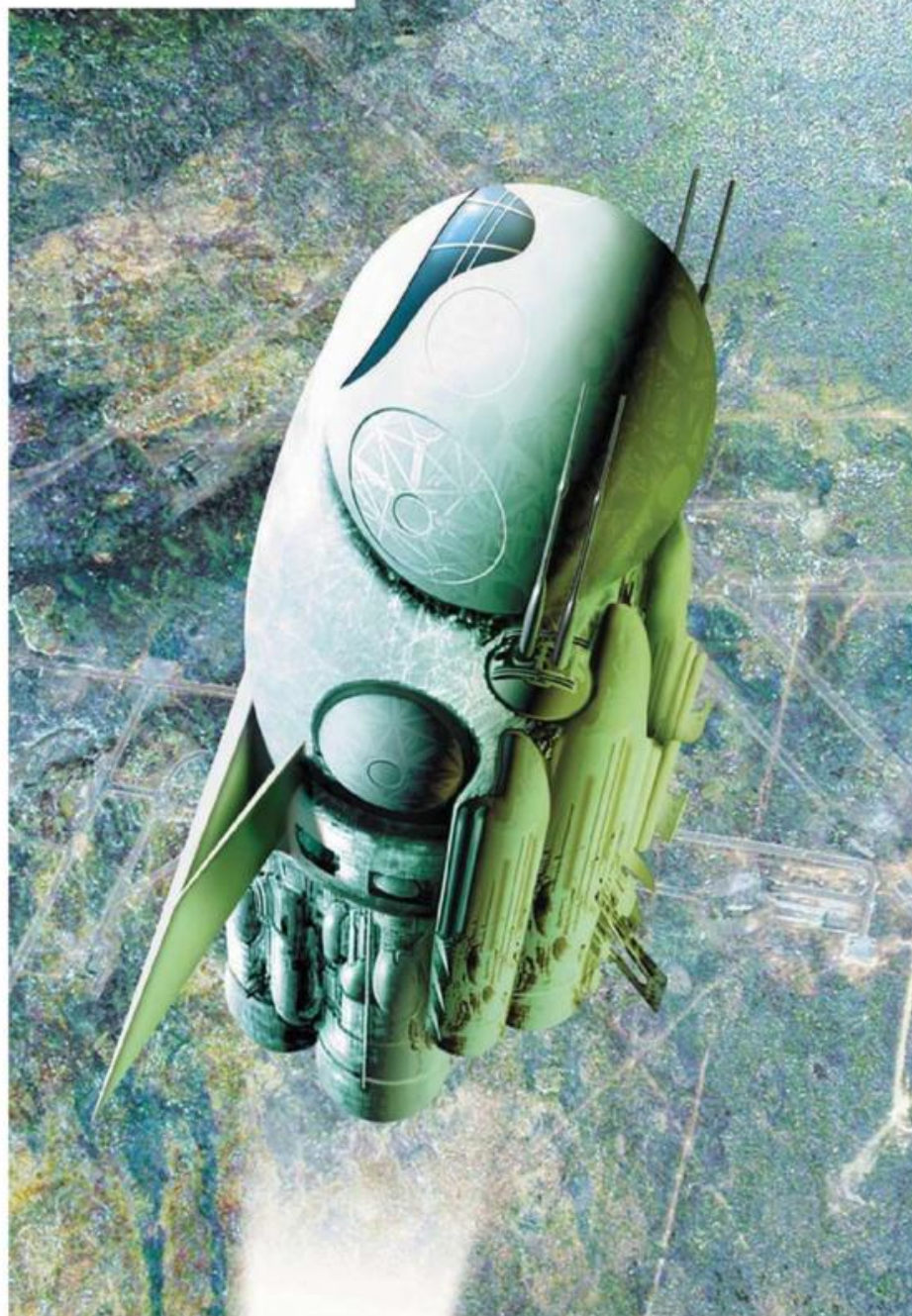


ILLUSTRATION BY JIM BURN

Featuring

WISH YOU WERE HERE

You won't need a rocket to experience space. New high-altitude balloons promise a slower, gentler trip (and a bar).

KALEE THOMPSON

PAGE 34

BUGGED

We live in fear of the microbes that inhabit our homes and buildings. But our health might depend on preserving theirs.

RINKU PATEL

PAGE 40

THE DRY SPELL

California is in the fourth year of its worst drought on record. Why can't scientists explain it? **JENEEN INTERLANDI**

PAGE 46

Departments

FEED

04 From the Editor

06 A Bit About Us

07 Peer Review

NOW

09 An e-bike to accelerate commutes

10 Ten things we love this month

11 Cadillac's luxury lightweight hybrid

14 Backcountry gear finds a new purpose

16 Now you can own a Tesla (battery)

17 A virtual camera for 3-D footage

21 Speakers that aim sound straight at you

22 Surfboards made by a rocket scientist

NEXT

25 Lightning, dissected

26 What's really on your dinner plate?

27 Vint Cerf on the future of the Internet

28 Diamonds grown in a lab

30 A helicopter that can fly like a jet

32 Your next pet should be a robot

MANUAL

61 Track your home's health

63 A fire extinguisher with bass

64 Rise of the MegaBot

65 A coffee-creamer mushroom cloud

66 Crave candy? Here's your machine

67 The man who keeps pets walking

END MATTER

68 Ask Us Anything: Could a lion live off veggie burgers?

78 From the Archives

ON THE COVER

A World View

Experience balloon.

Illustration

by PriestmanGoode



From the Editor

The Stars Within Reach

A few months ago, I found myself backstage with Bobak Ferdowsi. If you recall the landing of the *Curiosity* rover on Mars, then you probably remember him. Ferdowsi is a systems engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and because he happened to sit near the TV cameras—and because he wears

a pretty serious mohawk—he unintentionally became the face of the most successful space mission in decades. President Obama dubbed him the “Mohawk Guy,” and then invited him to take part in his inauguration parade.

Ferdowsi and I had agreed to speak at the Pioneers Festival—a startup gathering in Europe—on the topic of private space. While we chatted backstage, I lamented that it had been almost eight years since the first of Virgin Galactic's many

promised space-tourism launches. “And we're still waiting,” I said.

Ferdowsi nodded his head. The stars can seem out of reach, he said. “But I still see tourism as one of the greatest near-term opportunities in private space.” Then he began to tell me about balloons.

For most of us, the dream of getting to space typically involves rockets. And by and large, that's a correct assumption. To truly escape Earth's atmosphere requires tremendous power (along with a

healthy dose of strain, suffering, and corporeal risk).

Balloons offer a pretty compelling alternative. As we discuss in our cover story, “Wish You Were Here,” on page 34, they are a proven technology: Scientists have used them for years, and this past October, Google executive Alan Eustace rode one to 135,890 feet without incident. Balloons are also more affordable than rockets, and they are altogether more pleasant: a gentle ride up and a gentle ride down. There are no G-forces to contend with and no pressure suits to squeeze into.

Three high-altitude balloon startups have formed and are already pre-selling tickets for future flights. As imagined, the ride will entail sailing for a few hours at 100,000 feet in a pressurized capsule. At least one company plans to offer bar service because, why not?

As with anything, this type of

PASSENGERS
WILL FIND
THEMSELVES NEARLY
20 MILES UP,
DRINK IN HAND,
STARING OUT
AT THE CURVATURE
OF EARTH.



tourism will come with a few strings attached. Rides will not be cheap: between \$75K and \$125K. And technically they won't reach space. Close readers know that 100,000 feet is still well within the stratosphere; the boundary to space is about 330,000 feet. But passengers will still find themselves nearly 20 miles up, drink in hand, staring out at the curvature of Earth. So there's that. And then this: The first trips might launch as soon as 2017. Better start saving now.

Enjoy the magazine.

Cliff Ransom
Editor in Chief

Contributors



Rinku Patel

While we know that the human microbiome protects our health, “what's overlooked,” says science journalist Rinku Patel, “is the environment where we pick up the trillions of foreigners that shape our immune system.” Writing “Bugged” (page 40), about the microbes that share our real estate, put her on a mission. She now leaves her doors and windows open so the microbes can come in.



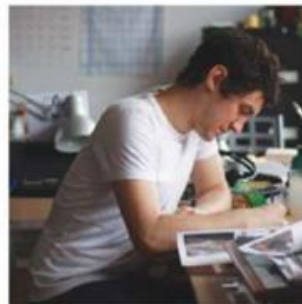
Jarren Vink

Photographer Jarren Vink is accustomed to making static objects look great. But the Tesla Powerwall (page 16) proved a challenge. “It looks like a giant cellphone,” Vink says. Despite the battery's unassuming design, it was wheeled into his studio in a wooden crate, stamped with the Tesla logo, worthy of an Old Masters shipped from the Louvre. “Too bad we couldn't shoot the crate,” says Vink.



Kalee Thompson

Contributing editor Kalee Thompson thought of space tourism as a pricey jaunt for the .001 percent. But after reporting “Wish You Were Here” (page 34), she now sees the appeal. Balloon trips to the stratosphere, albeit not quite space, are “more accessible,” Thompson says. And, she adds, they offer a serene group experience, “something you can take Grandma on to celebrate her 100th birthday.”



Sam Weber

We asked illustrator Sam Weber to envision sci-fi medicine in “Dispatches from the Future” (page 50). When searching for inspiration, he had to look no further than his girlfriend's recent Lasik eye surgery. “Contemporary eye surgery is terrifying,” Weber says. He even used his girlfriend as the model for his illustration—with an orange cornea, and glowing white filaments shooting from her face.

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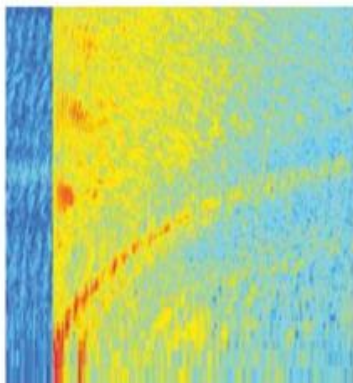
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A Bit About Us



WHAT DOES THUNDER LOOK LIKE?

For the first time, scientists can “see” the sound of thunder. The image at left shows how its acoustic energy dissipates. For more storm science, turn to page 25.

FROM THE ARCHIVES:
A Brief History of Extinguishing Fire

In Manual this month, we feature a project that uses sound to put out fire (page 63). We've written about creative ways to snuff flames before:

DECEMBER 1937

An inventor in New York thought one water hose wasn't enough. He devised an octopuslike sprinkler system with eight hoses. It was mounted on a tractor that he could drive through orchards and farms when fires broke out.

OCTOBER 1938

Find yourself without water? Perhaps there's

some dirt around. We described a unique tool that used rotary blades to scoop up sediment and spray it over blazes.

JUNE 1942

During World War II, we covered many new technologies designed to help the military. One used carbon dioxide to extinguish fires that broke out on plane wings during battle.



Earlier this year we spent a week swabbing surfaces around the office, including yoga balls, kitchen floors, and bathroom counters. We were afraid to see the results—and still are. They're on page 45.

30

Percentage of all diamonds that are sold to consumers (the rest are sold to industry)

To brush up on the latest diamond science, turn to page 28.

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JUNE
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CONCERNED YOUTH

Q:

I'm 14 years old, and a longtime reader of *Popular Science*. In the June 2015 article "Long Live the Mammoth," Beth Shapiro neglects a crucial point when talking about the pros and cons of de-extinction. Couldn't bringing back extinct species have negative impacts on other members of the ecosystem, and even lead to the extinction of other species?

Ronnie Eytchison, Huron, Ohio

A:

While it is impossible to predict every consequence of releasing a species into the wild, one critical component in selecting a species for de-extinction is to carefully evaluate risk at each stage of the process. This includes not only technical and ethical risks, but also ecological risks. To my mind, the goal of de-extinction technology is to restore missing components of an ecosystem so as to protect species that are alive today.

Beth Shapiro, evolutionary molecular biologist at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and author of *How to Clone a Mammoth: The Science of De-extinction*

TWEET OUT OF CONTEXT

No safety glasses—tsk, tsk, tsk...
@silentrnajority

WORD FROM THE WISE

As a librarian who has taught people how to do online research for 19 years, I have learned that no algorithm or "smart filter" can regularly provide and top-rank scientifically rigorous results for online medical searches ["Google Flunks Out of Medical School," June 2015]. We must all objectively evaluate the quality and validity of the information we find on Google.

John Hogle, Cupertino, California

A MORE PERFECT WORLD

I was amazed to read the criticism of stem-cell therapy from bioethicist Leigh Turner ["The Cure-All," June 2015]: "People are paying a lot of money for these treatments without any assurances." When was the last time a doctor guaranteed a treatment and/or gave your money back for a failed treatment? If you can find a doctor like that, please, let me know!

Bill Nicholson, Bradenton, Florida



RODENT CONTROL

Reader Brian Byon from Johns Creek, Georgia, invented a robot that he says, "can obey virtually any living organism."

In this case, it detects a mouse's movements through one of four sensors, each programmed to move the machine in a different direction.



HAVE A COMMENT?

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Choose Your Own Adventure

On page 34 we describe two very different journeys to the edge of space. If you were offered a seat, which would you choose: spaceplane or stratospheric balloon? **Tweet your answer to @popsci #spacetrip**

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Commuters love nothing more than blowing past hipsters on fixies. That's one reason the 28 mph Stromer ST2 electric bike is a total joy for urban cyclists. With a 90-mile range—twice that of other e-bikes—you can forgo work altogether and head for the hills.

The ST2 packs a 48-volt battery in the frame's down tube, evenly distributed for balance—another e-bike first. It also stretches battery life by way of regenerative braking. A gyroscope and accelerometer further boost efficiency by adjusting battery output while the bike is in motion.

Pedalers love the peripherals too. An onboard touchscreen displays your speed and power mode. Riders can customize the level of motor assistance by programming a custom profile; torque, pedal sensitivity, and power-assist level can all be changed on a whim or saved for later use. The bike also connects to Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) data networks on its own, without a data plan, so it's always connected. In the event it's stolen, GPS allows you to track it with your smartphone and lock it down remotely. Oh, and it looks like a two-wheel urban assault vehicle worthy of the Dark Knight. Eat your hearts out, Boy Wonders. **DAN KOEPPPEL**



STROMER ST2

Price \$6,990

Max Range

90 miles

Weight

62 pounds



Obsessed

Some things are just...better

LINDSEY KRATOCHWILL

1 DEATH STAR LIGHT-UP BEACH BALL

SwimWays lets you flaunt your *Star Wars* fanaticism ahead of this year's big-screen installment. It might not have planet-destroying lasers, but with embedded LEDs, you can use your imagination. **\$7**

2 CONNECTED COLLAR

DogTelligent's Connected Collar quiets unruly pups—and trains them to stay that way. An ultrasonic speaker emits a sound that discourages barking, plus the collar works as a virtual fence and leash. **\$130**

3 LUNA

Much of our lives is spent sleeping. So the Luna smart mattress cover uses sensors to track your sleep, and integrates with smart-home devices to control lights or a thermostat to create the optimal sleeping environment. **\$235**

4 HARDWARE STORE SAW

Brooklyn Tool & Craft's short-bladed saw has a unique tooth design that can handle both rip and crosscut jobs. The blade's diagonal scales and measuring tools help you convert to metric or check angles without reaching for the toolbox. **\$149**

5 WASTED SEA STAR PURPLE PALE ALE

Next time you reach for a cold one, the brewers at Rogue

hope you'll think of the disease that's killing millions of starfish. The brewery teamed with the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans to create this pale ale. Some proceeds will go toward researching sea star wasting syndrome. **\$6.75**

6 MAP OF LIFE

For backyard ecologists and curious travelers, Yale University's app makes learning about nature simple. Using your location, it helps you identify, say, what species of frog or tree you've found, and can alert you to others likely nearby. **Free**

7 BRAUN SERIES 9 SHAVER

Braun's most efficient shaver yet isn't just great at eliminating tough hairs that grow in strange directions. Its pivoting head and individually floating cutting elements can make a three-day beard disappear with fewer strokes. **\$350**

8 SURVIVAL LACES

Get yourself out of any bind with these shoestrings. Inside the extra-strong paracord laces you'll find fishing line, tinder, and a flint rod that can help start a fire. **\$15**

9 THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

Science journalist Anil Ananthaswamy's new book explores quirks of the mind with stories about people who lose their sense of self and believe they aren't alive. **\$27**



SLEEP SMARTER

10 BIG BLUE LIVE

Dive deep into the ecosystem of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary with the BBC and PBS. Over the course of two weeks, they'll air—on TV, streaming online, and through social media—a live show that takes viewers to the wilds of the West Coast to see humpback whales, sea otters, great white sharks, and other creatures up close. **Aug. 31**



FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY SWIMWAYS; COURTESY DOGTelligent; COURTESY ROGUE; COURTESY PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE; COURTESY TYSON V. RININGER / PBS; COURTESY BRAUN; COURTESY WASATCH OUTDOORS; COURTESY LUNA; COURTESY YALE UNIVERSITY; COURTESY BROOKLYN TOOL & CRAFT

CADILLAC INTRODUCES LIGHTWEIGHT LUXURY



Weight is a problem when it comes to fuel economy. The heavier something is, the more energy you burn moving it down the road. The engineers at Cadillac tackled this problem head-on with the new CT6. Rather than relying on expensive carbon fiber or heavy

steel, they created a lightweight chassis from a new composite. The result marries 11 materials including high-strength steel and lightweight aluminum, shaving 198 pounds off the traditional chassis.

Available as a hybrid—making it the first full-size electric luxury sedan—the car's drivetrain takes fuel efficiency a step further. An 18.4 kilowatt-hour lithium-ion battery powers an electric variable transmission capable of boosting acceleration

without spasmodic jolts. As for the gas-powered half, it's a small 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine. Combined, they provide the CT6 with a respectable 335 horsepower.

All this adds up to a luxury hybrid with more than double the mileage of its gas-powered counterpart. But true Caddy lovers will appreciate the new agility brought by the car's electric engine. The CT6's 2-ton rivals might want to invest in a treadmill. **JOSEPH OROVIC**



DESIGN OF THE MONTH

2016 Dodge Viper ACR

The 2016 Dodge Viper American Club Racer unabashedly exploits every downforce-enhancing body attachment imaginable. It sports a massive carbon-fiber rear wing,

a detachable extension for the front splitter, sinister-looking dive planes, and a hood with removable louvers. At 177 mph, it's the fastest street-legal track Viper ever.

The Setup

1

MSR SE200 COMMUNITY CHLORINE MAKER

For 25 years MSR has made lightweight, portable water filters for backpackers and U.S. soldiers. It has now employed that expertise to create the SE200. It's a chlorinator that uses table salt, water, and a 12-volt car battery to make enough chlorine to kill waterborne pathogens, turning a 55-gallon drum of tainted water drinkable. Health workers will use it to supply remote villages with clean water. **\$239**



2

GOSUN SPORT
GoSun's portable solar stove was designed for car camping and barbecues. Parabolic reflectors

surround and heat a borosilicate glass tube—which holds your food of choice—up to 550 degrees Fahrenheit. In full sun, it can cook a hot dog in less than 10 minutes. Last winter the company brought a less-expensive model of the stove to Guatemala, where it reduced cooking costs significantly. **\$249**



3

GRAVITYLIGHT

Kerosene lanterns are standard in developing countries. But they're expensive

and emit deadly fumes. The World Bank estimates that for the 780 million women and children who breathe them in, it's like smoking 40 cigarettes a day. To clear the

air, GravityLight's upcoming GL02 powers lanterns with kinetic energy. A 12-kilogram weight hanging from the lantern drops 6 feet on a high-torque drive sprocket, which

connects to a DC generator. A three-second drop powers an LED for 20 minutes. The company has tested it in more than 1,300 off-grid households. **Price not set**



BACKCOUNTRY GEAR TO SAVE YOUR LIFE—AND THE WORLD

Cooking burgers, purifying water, and lighting a campsite all require cleverly designed gear. But that doesn't have to be exclusive to the backcountry. Similar conditions exist all over the developing world. Now the gear that outdoor companies have spent years developing for adventurers and survivalists are playing important roles in low-resource areas. **HEATHER HANSMAN**

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Standout



You Can Finally Afford a Tesla



Installing solar power at home is good for your wallet and the environment, but storing it is no easy feat. Until recently, the process involved connecting a series of finicky, fragile, glorified car batteries. The Powerwall, unveiled by Tesla Motors CEO Elon Musk

earlier this spring, is no DIY project. It's a simple plug-and-play home lithium-ion battery aimed at changing the way people think about and store energy.

Its large curvy case is the size of a futuristic boogie board, and it's meant to be mounted on a wall like art. It draws electricity from the grid when demand and rates are low or sucks it from solar panels atop your roof (panels sold separately). The energy is saved for use during peak power-demand hours, when utilities raise rates, or as backup during a power outage.

The Powerwall fits in nicely with another Musk-backed company: SolarCity. But its creators say that Tesla Motors' prior research into electric cars is what made it possible.

The Powerwall comes in two models with different storage capacities, prices, and purposes: The 7-kilowatt-hour model costs \$3,000 and is designed specifically for daily solar-energy collection and discharging; the 10-kilowatt-hour model costs \$3,500 and is meant to store energy for weeks at time as backup. Up to nine Powerwalls of each type can be connected for even greater capacity.

In America, the number of solar installations is small but growing. And with the price of solar energy systems steadily declining (6 to 8 percent a year since 1998, according to the U.S. Department of Energy), analysts expect solar energy to reach price parity with the larger, fossil-fuel-dominated electrical grid as early as next year.

Solar junkies aren't waiting. Musk recently said the Powerwall was sold out through mid-2016, though customers can still place orders online. Based on potential future savings, it might be well worth the wait. **CARL FRANZEN**



TESLA POWERWALL

Dimensions

51.2" x 33.9" x 7.1"

Weight

220

pounds

Colors

Proto-types include white, charcoal, red, and blue

Models

•10 kWh \$3,500

For backup

•7 kWh \$3,000

For daily cycle

5.7

Number, in millions, of virtual-reality devices projected to be sold in 2015

The Camera That Makes Virtual Reality Feel Real



Facebook, Google, HTC, and plenty of startups are betting big on virtual reality. But VR headsets could join the graveyard of overhyped gadgets if there's nothing to watch. Luckily production houses and filmmakers are working on realistic virtual experiences. Though it's going to take more than a camera that can shoot 360 degrees of footage.

Arthur van Hoff, co-founder of virtual-reality studio Jaunt VR, is a

tinkerer. At age 12 he made a working photocopier out of LEGOs and a felt-tip pen, and he used that ingenuity to build the Jaunt prototype camera. It's made of 16 modified GoPro cameras housed in a 3-D-printed carousel. Jaunt's fleet of 20 has logged hundreds of hours of footage, like Paul McCartney performing "Live and Let Die" and Yahoo Screen's sci-fi comedy *Other Space*. But the real innovation comes after the shoot.

As is, the picture looks flat (Jaunt calls it "2-and-a-half-D"). For normal 3-D movies, a pair of stereoscopic cameras shoot two versions of each scene. They're split into separate feeds—one for the left eye, one for the right—and projected on top of one another, and polarized glasses trick the brain into seeing depth.

Things get messy when 16 cameras are shooting in 16 directions. So Jaunt created a virtual camera. Software synchronizes all the video streams to make it appear as if they were shot by a single camera at the center of the array, and turns the footage into two feeds for the left eye and right eye. Now when the evil villain lunges at you, it feels so realistic, you might forget you can take off the headset. **ANDREW ROSENBLUM**

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Speakers That Cut Through Noise



PROBLEM

Everyday speakers—whether they're in a cellphone, TV, or radio—scatter sound waves as soon as they leave the cone. A single wave can bounce off dozens of surfaces, slamming into other signals and degrading along the way, before reaching your ear in a muddled mess. Adding to this audio chaos, most midrange TVs only emit sound from rear or downward-facing speakers. So turning them up just doesn't help. Gamers and TV obsessives often turn to soundbars and directional speakers for relief, but even those don't offer a true high-fidelity fix.

SOLUTION

HyperSound Clear speakers aim sound waves directly at a listener using a tightly focused beam. It uses ultrasonic waves, which don't disperse as quickly or easily as standard sound waves. Embedded in that signal is high-fidelity audio with zero disruption. That means a movie's epic surround sound can be directed straight at your ear—just like a laser. HyperSound speakers were designed for the hearing impaired, and like hearing aids, they must be tuned by a doctor. However, in 2014, gaming audio giant Turtle Beach merged with HyperSound's parent company, raising hopes in the gaming world that laser-focused high-fidelity will be coming to Cheetos-crusted couches one day soon.

MICHAEL NUÑEZ



Too Much Innovation

SMART PLATE, DUMB IDEA



We Americans are a health-obsessed bunch, buying niche gadgets like wearable step trackers and sensor-filled

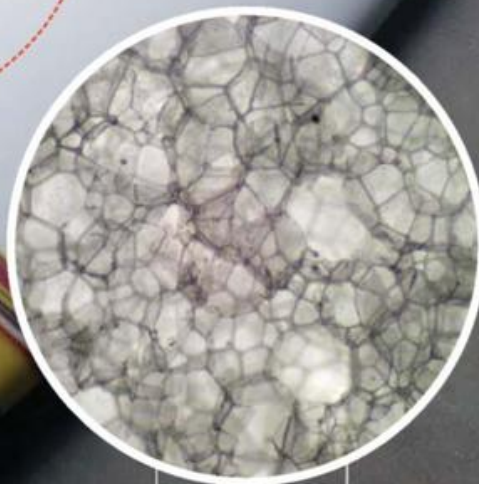
adhesive strips to help maintain our fitness. Now to keep our outrageous consumption habits in check, there's the SmartPlate—a \$149 Wi-Fi-connected dinner plate that automatically measures the calories in every meal. The plate is equipped with three cameras embedded within the plate's meal dividers. The cameras work with an object-recognition smartphone app. Scales in each compartment determine portion sizes. The system can identify more than 400,000



different types of food. It's accurate enough to tell the difference between wheat and flour pasta, and the app offers suggestions for what to add and subtract from your meals. The American Heart Association has even partnered with the company. Yet the SmartPlate isn't dishwasher or microwave friendly, which could deter the average glutton from forking over the cash. Because as we know, a dinner plate that can't be used to nuke Hot Pockets is useless in most American homes. **LOREN GRUSH**

A Surfboard Made By a Rocket Scientist

Edison Conner, a former SpaceX rocket scientist and co-founder of Varial Surf Technology, tried for years to create a durable surfboard from aerospace material. In his eyes, the surfboard industry was ripe for disruption. Makers had clung to one manufacturing method for more than 50 years. For strength and flexibility, they created a spine from a strand of wood (known as a stringer) and glued it into a polyurethane foam cast. The cast was sanded and wrapped in fiberglass and resin. Conner and the other engineers at Varial tried something different. They replaced the wooden stringer with an ultra-rigid foam similar to the type used in helicopter rotor blades and in rocket-propulsion systems. The foam is 30 percent stronger, with seven times the stiffness (or modulus) of conventional foam. It's also 25 percent lighter. That means surfers have a board that's easier to control and more durable.



PEEK INSIDE

This 70x magnification of the Varial Foam microstructure reveals a tight cell structure made up of defined angles and polygonal shapes. The rigid structure of the foam makes surfboards lighter, stronger, and easier to ride.

Varial's chemists altered the polymers of the foam, producing high levels of crystallinity. The crystallized foam consists of structured, rigid latticelike polymer chains. Crystallization also makes cell walls thinner. That lets chemists pack more cells into a tighter, more-angular (or polygonal) cell structure. The structure is stronger and firmer than the looser, more-bubblelike cell structure of conventional polyurethane foam.

Aside from strength and durability, the new boards have more action (or buoyancy) in the water. "They are ultra light, which I love in smaller waves," says top pro surfer Shane Dorian, who won the Billabong Ride of the Year Award in 2015. "Ninety percent of the time, I'm surfing head-high waves or smaller, so the responsiveness of the light boards is amazing." **MARK ANDERS**



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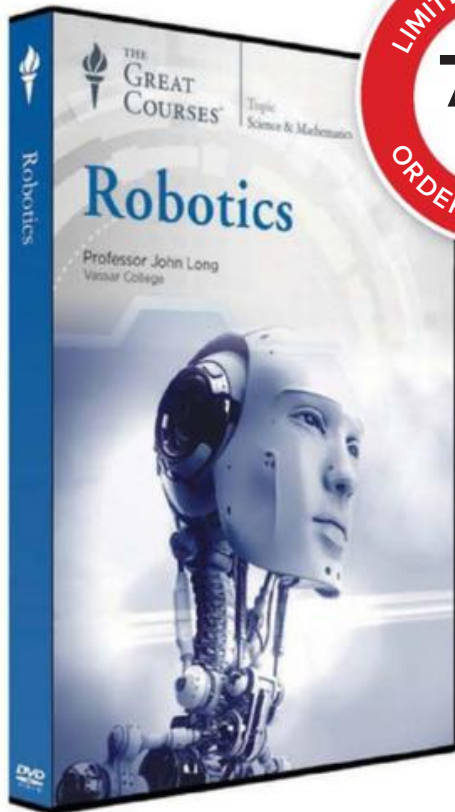
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Next



Lightning is incredibly powerful. One strike can contain 1,500 megajoules of energy—enough to power a 100-watt lightbulb for six months. But scientists know only the basics of how it works. Maher A. Dayeh, a heliophysicist at the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, aims to change that. In July 2014, his team triggered a bolt (shown here) by shooting a rocket trailing copper wire into a storm cloud. Fifteen microphones captured the sound waves created as heated air around the bolt expanded and then compressed. The result? The first-ever acoustic image of thunder. From it, researchers can infer how much energy went into forming the bolt, and how much it radiated as sound. Lightning is violent, Dayeh says. “Prediction and protection are almost impossible if we don’t understand the process in the first place.” **RACHEL FOBAR**

3.9

Estimated number of times, in millions, lightning strikes Earth every day, according to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center

TAKING THE GUESSWORK OUT OF FOOD



Between the reports of *E. coli*-tainted spinach and Listeria-laden ice cream, it's easy to become paranoid about what to eat. And rightly so: One in six Americans will get a food-borne illness this year. But a number of new and soon-to-exist food-monitoring technologies can help keep your fridge contaminant-free, flag when something should be tossed, and tell you exactly what's on your plate. **HEATHER HANSMAN**



1 MILK
Scientists at Peking University in Beijing created gold nanorod tags to put on food packages. They're designed to deteriorate at the same rate as what's inside. A color change will indicate if a jug of milk has gone bad without having to take a whiff (or worse, a swig). "In principle, the tag can be used for any product that deteriorates over time and is packaged air-tightly: beverages, medicines, vaccines, and more," researcher Chao Zhang says.

2 MEAT
Expiration dates are static; people often throw away food that's still good—or eat food that's gone bad. Chemists at MIT created a thin sensor that can be put inside meat packaging. Its metal-lined carbon nanotubes carry a current that drops when it encounters amines, chemicals produced by decaying meat.

3 FISH
The FDA limit for mercury in tuna is 1 part per million. But levels vary from fish to fish. While most tuna companies sample a few fish per catch, Safe Catch made a quick test to biopsy every tuna at the dock, accurate to 0.1 ppm. "We're not OK using anyone's average," says Bryan Boches, Safe Catch co-founder.

4 OLIVE OIL
A 2012 study found that 60 percent of olive oil sold to restaurants in California as "extra virgin" didn't meet USDA quality standards. Researchers at the University of California at Davis developed an enzyme-based electrochemical biosensor that ferrets out aldehydes indicative of less-pure oil.

5 FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
When food-borne illness breaks out, it can take months to follow the bug back to the source. A food-safe spray called DNATrax, developed at Lawrence Livermore National Lab, uses DNA extracted from plants to create a traceable molecular bar code that's unique to fresh produce's farm of origin.

33

Percentage of fish sold in U.S. stores and restaurants that were mislabeled, according to a 2013 Oceana study

A Food Label Just for You

Frustrated by one-size-fits-all nutrition facts, designers at New York University decided to intervene. "We want food labels for consumers rather than a compromise between government, food lobbies, and big food companies," says Sam Slover. Their app, called Sage, uses info like your weight and activity level to create personalized labels for food. If you've got a peanut allergy, it can flag risky products. If you splurge on cheesecake, it'll tell you how many minutes you'll have to spend on the elliptical to burn it off.



Vint Cerf

On the Interplanetary Internet



The Internet has changed a lot over its 30-something years. That terrible dial-up noise is gone; the Ethernet cord has been cut; Tinder happened. What's next? If anyone knows, it's Vint Cerf, Google's vice president and chief Internet evangelist. He is

considered a "father of the Internet" for developing the protocols that run it: breaking information into packets, sending them into cyberspace, and reassembling them onto your screen. Cerf has watched his baby grow up and get smarter. Now he's envisioning how it will mature in the coming decades.

50

Number of devices, in billions, Cisco Systems Inc. expects to be connected to the Internet by 2020

“

When we turned on the Internet in 1983, having a powerful computer in your pocket was science fiction. But the Internet has evolved beyond even cellphones to encompass smart objects that talk to each other and to you. Those devices—called the Internet of Things—now need standard protocols that allow connected products from different companies to work as an ensemble.

Soon cars, buildings, cities, and people will have sensors and software that track resources, respond to crime, or take constant vital signs. In that environment, machine learning will become increasingly important—not insane robots but systems much smarter than today's Google searches.

Once we've connected everything to everything else, safety and privacy will be big challenges. It's impossible to stop abuse, but we have to be able to detect it. We need to develop better security and authentication technology, as well as better international agreements to prosecute cross-country cybercrimes.

The Internet, though, will extend beyond political borders, and even beyond Earth. A prototype Interplanetary Internet already stretches between our planet and the International Space Station. Astronauts use it to communicate with Earth. The Interplanetary Internet will evolve and expand as old spacecraft become nodes in its backbone, helping pass along signals.

To handle the delays and disruptions that occur in space, we need robust protocols. I helped develop the new "bundle protocol," which assumes the link will break occasionally. When that happens, it stores the packets of data and waits to send them until the connection becomes secure again. The United Nations is in the process of adopting it as the standard that will support manned and robotic exploration into deep space.

We initially designed the Internet to be a network of networks that could expand over time. And so it has. And so it will." **AS TOLD TO SARAH SCOLES**

"There are only about 3 billion people online. It's not everybody in the world, so there's a lot of work to be done."

Lab-Grown Diamonds to Keep Electronics Cool

A clear, sparkling diamond is rare. That's part of its appeal. Those mined today formed billions of years ago. But a new method can grow gem-quality diamonds on demand in just three months. They're identical to their natural counterparts and cost 30 to 40 percent less. That's promising for anyone in the market for an engagement ring. And it bodes well for the future of electronics too. **REBECCA HARRINGTON**



5

In March, IIA opened the world's largest diamond-growing facility in Singapore. It's capable of cranking out more than 300,000 carats a year, using half the energy of diamond mining. Plus it has far less environmental impact. To the naked eye, the diamonds are indistinguishable from natural ones. But they'll still be a tough sell for jewelry, where lab-grown make up less than 1 percent of the market. "They're seen as inauthentic, no matter that they are objectively identical," explains Ravi Dhar, director of the Center for Customer Insights at Yale University.



72

Global diamond jewelry sales, in billions of dollars, per year

6

Diamond's unsurpassed thermal conductivity makes it an ideal heat sink for electronics. It transfers about twice the heat and can carry more current than the silicon usually used in semiconductors. IIA is working to grow diamond plates that will enable smaller, more-powerful devices that don't overheat. "It will take time," says physicist Devi Shanker Misra, who invented IIA's technique, "but I hope that it will replace silicon."

1

Global demand for diamonds is currently on the rise, thanks in part to a growing middle class in countries such as India and China. But it's been a decade since a large diamond mine has been discovered. By 2019, demand is projected to outstrip supply by 5 to 6 percent.

2

Luckily, diamonds can also be made in a lab. In the 1950s, scientists first created diamonds by replicating the intense heat and pressure that forms them underground. The stones tend to be discolored and small (in some cases just a powder), but they retain a natural diamond's defining properties.

3

Diamond is one of the hardest known materials. It can withstand high levels of radiation and doesn't trigger an immune response. This makes it useful in construction, nuclear engineering, and medicine. In 2013, industry used about 1,500 tons of diamond, 99 percent of which were lab-grown.

4

To make purer gems, diamond-grower IIA Technologies refined a process called chemical vapor deposition. In a vacuum chamber, they shower a fingernail-thin diamond "seed" with microwave rays and methane and hydrogen gases. These build up layers of carbon bonds.

"If anyone says they can tell the difference without a machine, they're lying."

—ARIEL BARUCH, JEWELER AT DIAMONDS BY ISRAEL STANDARD INC., WHICH SELLS LAB-GROWN DIAMONDS



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Future conflicts will favor faster, nimbler military forces—think precision strikes and special ops. “The military needs assets that allow

them to project their combat power more rapidly,” says Keith Flail, a program director at Bell Helicopter. It needs an aircraft that can hover for tactical maneuvers but also conquer the “tyranny of distance.”

The V-280 Valor could do just that. Its tilt-rotor design allows the craft to take off and land vertically, like a helicopter, or pitch its rotors forward to fly horizontally, like a turboprop plane. It stands to be safer and more agile than its clunky cousin, the V-22 Osprey. And with



“Our nation and our service members should never have to fight a fair fight.”

—KEITH FLAIL, DIRECTOR OF THE FUTURE VERTICAL LIFT PROGRAM AT BELL HELICOPTER

twice the speed and combat range of the Army's current workhorse, the Black Hawk helicopter, the V-280 could vastly extend the reach of U.S. ground forces.

Bell Helicopter's design is vying

for the top spot in the Army's Future Vertical Lift program, which aims to develop a family of next-generation rotorcraft. If chosen, the V-280, or something like it, could be navigating the skies by 2030. CLAY DILLOW

1

STREAMLINED NACELLES

Unlike the larger, less-agile V-22 Osprey, the V-280's rotors tilt while its engines and gear boxes remain stationary. This eliminates moving parts, and keeps the engine housing out of the way to make entering and exiting the aircraft easier and safer.

2

CARBON ROTOR BLADES

The first-ever all-carbon tilt-rotor blades make the V-280 light and maneuverable, particularly when operating at low speeds. They also boost stability in crosswinds and can reduce propeller downwash, which affects cargo loads tethered to the aircraft's belly.

3

FLY-BY-WIRE CONTROLS

In conventional helicopters, the pilot spends a good deal of effort simply keeping the aircraft stable. The V-280's advanced fly-by-wire controls allow flight computers to do much of that work, which is especially useful when transitioning between its two flight modes.

4

STRAIGHT WING

In contrast to swept wings, which form the V-shape of most jets' profiles, Bell's engineers designed a straight wing with a single drive shaft that runs its length. This enables the craft to operate both rotors via a single engine if one loses power.

5

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

A head-up display on the visor of the pilot's helmet stitches together footage from six cameras on the outside of the craft. This allows the pilot to essentially see through the walls to what's beneath, beside, or behind the plane. As Flail describes it: "It's kind of like flying in Wonder Woman's jet."

6

MODULAR PAYLOAD BAY

The payload bay could hold weapons systems that turn the V-280 into a fast-moving gunship. Close air support weapons could be extended from the bay doors during combat and articulate back into the aircraft during cruise flight to reduce drag.

Robot Pets Have a Leg Up on Fido



Humans have been bonding with domestic animals for tens of thousands of years, but Jean-Loup Rault, an animal scientist at the University of Melbourne, thinks new companions are coming: robot pets. Just as digital technologies have altered how we interact with each other, they could soon do the same for us and animals.

This may not sit well with pet-lovers. A plastic dog is hardly as cuddly as a Pomeranian. But Rault argues the robot variety has a lot going for it: "You don't have to feed it; you don't have to walk it; it won't make a mess in your house; and you can go on holidays without feeling guilty." Plus mechanical animals could open up pet ownership to people with allergies, mobility issues, or tiny apartments.

The biggest selling point might be that robot pets combine the utility of a machine with the companionship of an animal. Dan Goldman, who works with biomechanical robots at the Georgia Institute of Technology, spitballs what one might look like: "It'll be a dog that can read your emotions and respond. It'll be a snake that can slither under your bed to find toys." One day we might even be able to transfer a robot pet's memory to an upgraded model to make it a lifelong companion.

That's convincing on a practical level, but it doesn't address whether humans can actually bond with machines. Studies suggest we can: When companion robots like

Paro, the sensor-studded interactive seal, have been given to nursing-home residents, they can improve moods, combat loneliness, and increase

social engagement. "As humans, we're eager to bond with things," says Bill Smart, who studies human-robot interactions at Oregon State University. "People give their cars names. Kids give their stuffed animals backstories." So too with robots. When Sony shut down the last tech clinic for its discontinued dog Aibo in March 2014, owners in Japan held funerals.

In the end, what might hold people back from

adopting robot pets could be as simple as their frame of reference. For those who grew up with living, breathing, slobbering pets, the mechanical kind might not do. Neither Rault nor Smart wants one. But for kids who constantly engage with smart technology, extending that connection to a robot dog or dino just might be the next logical step. **BREANNA DRAXLER**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROBOPETS

1996 Tamagotchi
1998 Furby
1999 Aibo
2001 Paro
2002 Roomba
2005 iDog
2006 Pleo
2014 MiP
2015 Ringo



"At some level you know it's a robot. But as you interact with it, you'll probably find yourself doing things that you'd do with animals." —BILL SMART, ROBOTICIST AT OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY



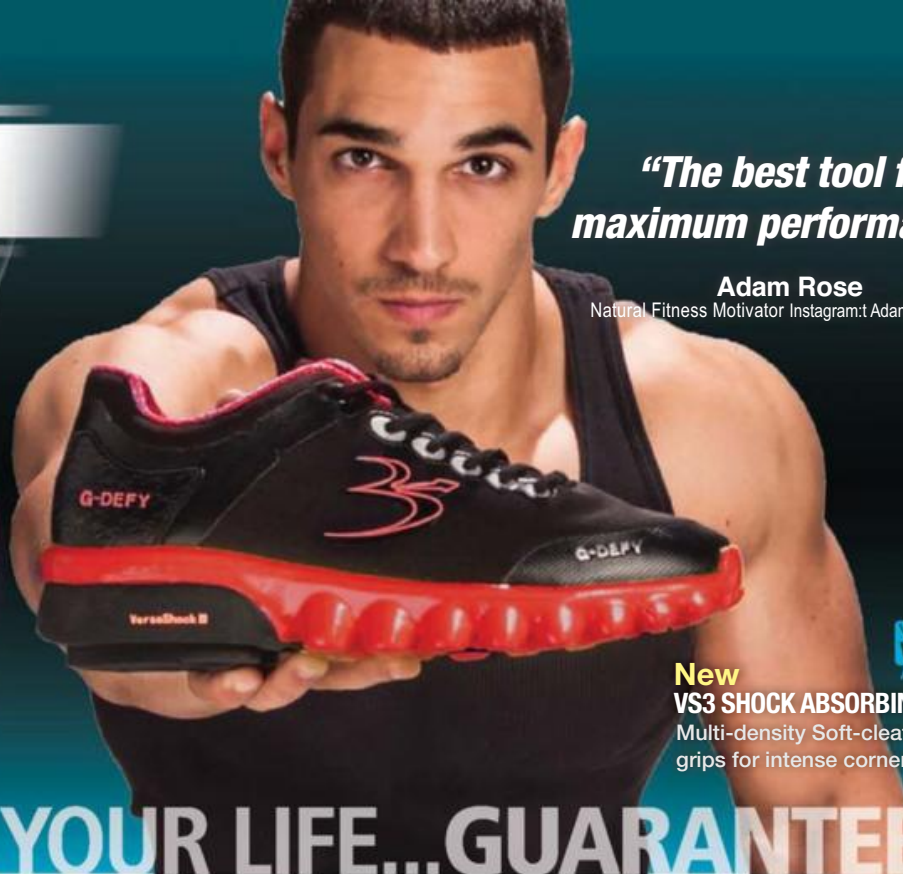
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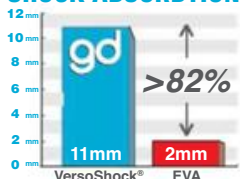
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World View Experience says
it will take passengers to the
stratosphere by 2017.

Wish You Were Here

You don't need a rocket to experience space.
There's a slower, gentler trip in the
works—and it comes with a cocktail.

By Kalee Thompson



A helium-filled balloon will carry Zero2Infinity's tourist pod to 22 miles above Earth.

When Alan Eustace lifted off into space from the New Mexico desert this past October, it was with a quiet whoosh, and a slight jostle of his harness. The 57-year-old computer scientist from Google—outfitted in a 260-pound pressurized space suit—dangled solo from a polyethylene balloon as thin as a dry-cleaning bag. As the balloon rose steadily into the air, the small bubble of helium inside began to expand, and with each mile the balloon changed shape. At first it undulated skyward, limp and oblong, like a jellyfish. Then it grew into a soft, bulbous teardrop. Finally, as Eustace neared his destination, 25 miles above the planet's surface, it became perfectly firm and rounded, a shimmering object the size of a football stadium. Above him spanned the blackness of space. Beneath him lay what has long drawn humans to these heights: the soul-altering view of the curvature of Earth.

To most, Eustace's flight seemed the antithesis of space travel, which since the dawn of the space age has been synonymous with the fiery roar of a rocket. The first private companies racing to take paying customers to the edge of space—Virgin Galactic, XCOR Aerospace, and Blue Origin—promise the kind of thrill ride experienced by astronauts. But there's an alternate space race taking shape, one whose selling point is slow and serene. A handful of startups are rushing to pioneer tourist trips to the stratosphere beneath enormous balloons. "Balloons are a beautiful mechanism for taking off," Eustace says. "You're perfectly balanced; it's perfectly quiet; there's no vibration as you're going up." Once at altitude, passengers will drift with the winds as they peer from the comfort of

a pressurized capsule. After a few hours, they will glide back to Earth beneath a wing-shaped parafoil.

For one company, Eustace's StratEx mission was proof of principle—a "one-man version" of stratospheric balloon tourism, says Taber MacCallum. He and his partner, Jane Poynter, headed Paragon Space Development Corporation, which managed Eustace's flight plan and built his life-support system. The couple then started World View Experience, a Tucson, Arizona, operation that intends to be the first to take customers to 100,000 feet, or 19 miles, for \$75,000 a head. They project the maiden flight will take place by 2017.

Zero2Infinity in Barcelona and Chinese startup Space Vision also anticipate flying passengers in the next few years. They are

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TAKE YOUR
PARENTS
AND
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IT'S GOING
TO BE THE
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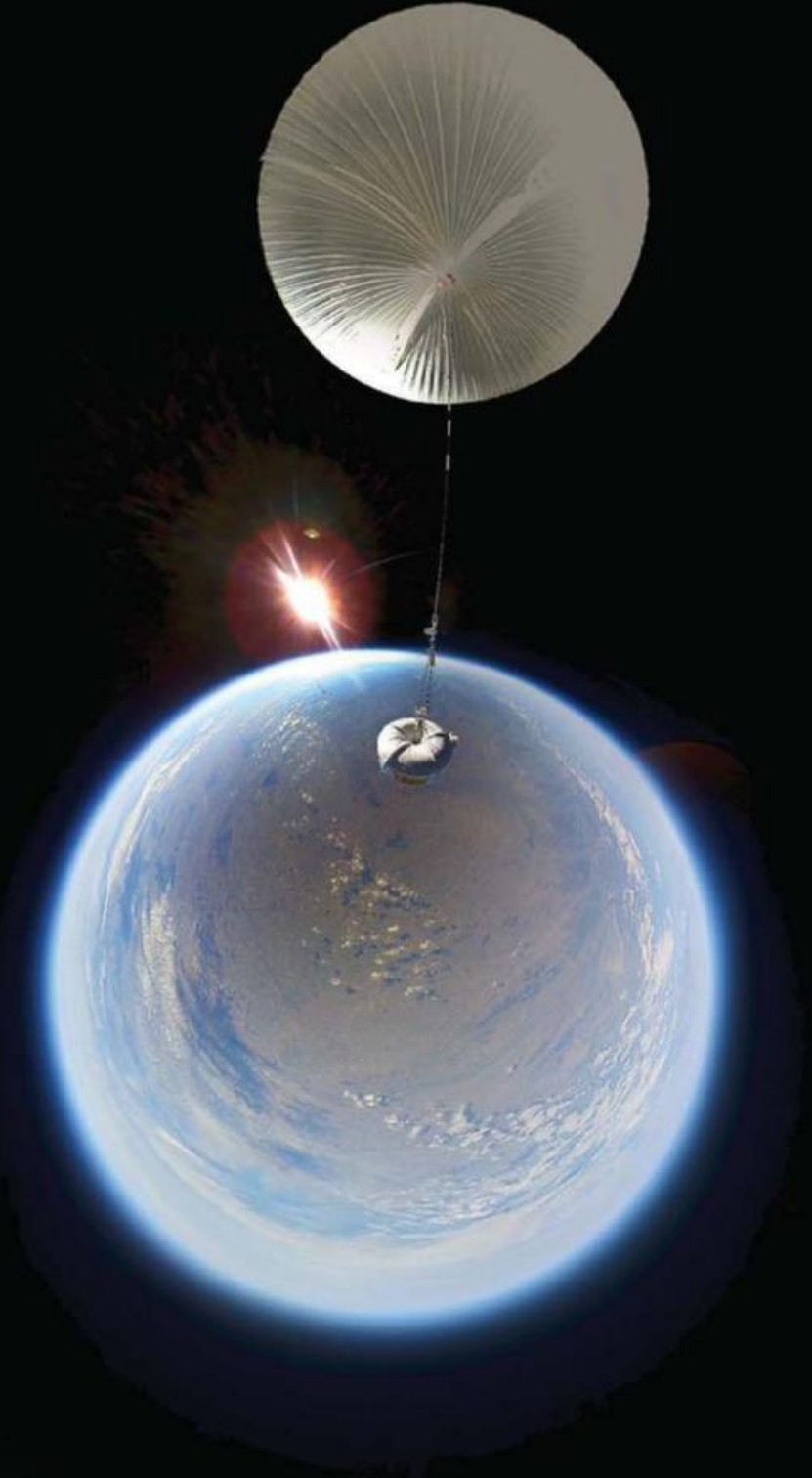
selling tickets for about \$125,000 and \$80,000, respectively. The fees are steep, but not when compared with \$250,000 for a seat on Virgin Galactic's suborbital spaceplane, or the \$50 million broker Space Adventures charges for a weeklong jaunt to the International Space Station.

Altogether, balloons could offer a more inclusive form of space tourism. "It's a very slow, gentle ride up and a slow, gentle ride back, and you get to be up there for hours," MacCallum says. Without the gravitational forces of takeoff and landing, the flight comes with minimal health restrictions. Motion sickness is unlikely to be an issue. Couples might get married in near-space, or celebrate a grandparent's birthday. World View is already taking \$7,500 deposits to secure seats on future flights. "We've had families sign up and buy the whole capsule," MacCallum says. "You can take your parents and children. It's going to be the ultimate Facebook status update: the entire family in space."

In 2002, two years before Scaled Composites claimed the \$10 million Ansari XPRIZE for private spaceflight, Zero2Infinity's founder, José Mariano López-Urdiales, wrote a paper for grad school entitled "The Role of Balloons in the Future Development of Space Tourism." In it, he calculated stratospheric ballooning could be a \$10 billion-a-year industry. Much of the technology required to send tourists to such altitudes—the balloons, the helium fuel, the pressurized capsules—had been well proved, López-Urdiales noted. It's also relatively affordable and easy to procure.

Rocket flight, in contrast, is both costly and difficult. The public got a stark reminder of that this past fall, when Virgin Galactic's *SpaceShipTwo* exploded over the Mojave Desert, killing a test pilot. "When you light a rocket, 10,000 things can happen, and only one of them is good," says Michael López-Alegria, a former NASA astronaut who recently signed on to advise

Wish You Were Here



Zero2Infinity. With balloons, he says, “you’re not going as fast, you’re not going as high, you’re not putting as much energy into the system.”

Whereas Virgin Galactic plans to soar to nearly 330,000 feet—just past the 62-mile mark widely considered the threshold of space—balloons will top out at just over 100,000 feet. The difference is not as significant as it might seem. “At that altitude, you’ve got 99 percent of the atmosphere underneath you,” says former space-shuttle commander Mark Kelly, now the director of flight operations for World View. “You’re essentially in a vacuum. You’re in the blackness of space.” He agrees with López-Alegria that balloons pose less risk. “If you can take the complexity out of getting people to that vantage point,” he says, “at least theoretically you can do it a lot safer.”

The straightforward nature of balloons has long been appealing. In fact, they powered the very first space race. In 1931, a balloon lifted Auguste Piccard and Paul Kipfer to the stratosphere in a pressurized capsule, a feat described in the August 1931 issue of *Popular Science* as an “adventure [that] surpasses fiction.” As we wrote then: “Seventeen hours later, after being given up for dead, they returned safely from an altitude of more than 52,000 feet, almost ten miles, shattering every aircraft altitude record.” New records continued to be set and broken through the 1950s. And then in 1960, U.S. Air Force Capt. Joe Kittinger rose to 102,800 feet. His record stood for 52 years—until October 2012, when Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner ascended to 128,100 feet. Eustace passed Baumgartner’s milestone two years later, reaching 135,890 feet.

Like Kittinger and Baumgartner before him, Eustace floated briefly in the stratosphere, taking in a view he calls “marvelous.” As he remembers now, “It’s beautiful watching how the light diffuses through the different levels of the atmosphere.” And then Eustace released his balloon and fell back to Earth

protected by only his space suit. His body reached 822 miles per hour, exceeding the speed of sound, before the atmosphere thickened and a parachute deployed to slow his descent. To succeed at ushering in a new form of balloon-based tourism, companies will have to figure out a way to get customers not only up, but also down.

A **balloon ride** to the stratosphere will be a three-part act: the launch, the pleasant cruise at altitude, and the trip back to Earth. The first part should be straightforward. For its commercial flights, World View plans to use a balloon that's more than 400 feet in diameter—the same size as the one that carried Eustace. (Though it will be towing a 9,000-pound tourist capsule, the balloon doesn't need to ascend as high.) Because of the StratEx mission, World View's team has practice launching it.

Zero2Infinity has been launching unmanned balloons as a test for two different business ventures: stratospheric tourism and a commercial satellite delivery system. It's also designed a doughnut-shaped craft that it plans to adapt for both applications. The version that will carry tourists, called a Bloon, will be big enough to hold two pilots and four passengers. The company has so far built a prototype half that size and used it to send a small humanoid robot to near-space. ("In the old days it would have been a



↑ Passengers in World View's capsule (here, a mock-up) will have Internet access for uploading photos.

**THE
CAPSULE
WILL
HAVE A
BAR
AND A
BATHROOM,
AND THE
CREW WILL
DOUBLE AS
BARTENDERS
AND TOUR
GUIDES.**

dog or a monkey," López-Urdiales says.) Equipped with cameras and sensors, the robot helped the engineers at Zero2Infinity understand the passenger experience. When the robot looked through the windows, which ring the outside wall, reflections marred the view. As a result, the window's position will likely change, López-Urdiales says.

World View envisions an oblong capsule with viewing ports on each side. About the size of a small Winnebago, it will have seats for six passengers, a pilot, and a crew member. Passengers will need to be buckled in for liftoff and landing, but most of the ride will be a casual sail, like a skiff gliding across the surface of a lake in a light breeze. Although winds at 100,000 feet can reach 130 miles per hour, the high speed won't be perceptible. That's because Earth, which provides the only reference point, will appear to barely move. The capsule will have a bar and a bathroom, MacCallum says, and the crew will double as bartenders and tour guides.

Both MacCallum and López-Urdiales agree that balloon tourism should provide a shirtsleeve environment throughout the flight. "The goal is to have no training, no space suits," MacCallum says. "This will be very similar to a commercial-airline flight, where you're given a briefing and off you go." But outside the pressurized capsule, the environment is lethal. Exposure would mean near-instant death. For that reason, the companies will have to decide how to balance comfort with

safety in the event of an emergency.

"At the very least the pilot should be wearing a space suit," says Art Thompson, whose aerospace company, Sage Cheshire, built the pressurized capsule that carried Baumgartner to the stratosphere. "If you have an issue with the craft, you want the pilot to be able to be in control." The smartest strategy, Thompson says, might be to convince tourists to wear suits too. Of course, space suits require training, and looking like an astronaut might not have as much appeal as being able to easily sip a cocktail or hold your kid's hand at 100,000 feet. At this point, the companies just seem to be banking on their ability to get the capsule down if a problem is detected—no awkward garments or free-fall skills required.

The third phase of the journey, the return, will be the most difficult. So World View is now heavily focused on refining the parafoils that will deliver the capsules to Earth. "We want to have enough cross-range to be able to fly to an airstrip and gently land in a predetermined place," MacCallum says. "Doing that from 100,000 feet has never been done." Because the air at that altitude is so thin, many doubted it was possible. But the company has now flown unmanned parafoils from 100,000 feet three times, each with a payload of about 100 pounds. This summer they plan to step it up by a factor of 10, testing the GPS-guided system



↑ Physicist Auguste Piccard prepares to make his second balloon trip to the stratosphere in 1932.

The Ride of Your Life

Space tourism will offer different experiences, depending on the cost of a ticket—and your taste for adventure. Here are two.

STRATOSPHERIC BALLOON

CARRIER:
World View
Experience

COST:
\$75,000



1 You board the capsule a couple of hours before dawn. The monstrous polyethylene balloon that will lift you into the stratosphere towers in the air above. You choose a seat, but it doesn't really matter—they all swivel for a 360-degree view. After a five-minute briefing from the pilot, a former astronaut, the craft begins to rise.

2 The ascent is slow and steady, averaging about 11 mph. You barely feel it. As the helium inside the balloon expands, the shape transforms from a long, thin tear-drop into a taut, rounded object. After an hour and a half, the balloon reaches 100,000 feet. You're free to walk around, use the restroom, or have a cocktail.

3 The craft drifts at this altitude. Its movement is gentle; the pilots refer to it as "sailing." They point out constellations and planets. Soon, the sunrise

begins, illuminating the winding scar of the Grand Canyon 19 miles below. Your pilot describes his own first experience with the so-called overview effect, the emotional shift in perspective that comes with gazing down at Earth. You pull out your phone and snap a picture, a selfie from the stratosphere.

4 After two hours, the pilot vents helium from the balloon to begin a descent. He then sets the balloon free, leaving the capsule hanging from a 100-foot-wide parasail. It

begins a directed glide. The wind pushed the balloon several hundred miles, and the parafoil will make up most of that distance on the return. The pilot's attention is focused on flying—this is the part of the trip he has trained for. The sensation is similar to being in a small, perfectly silent airplane. The swooping descent takes less than an hour, delivering you to an airfield four to five hours after you lifted off.

with a 1,000-pound payload over the southwestern United States. "Assuming all that goes well, by the end of this year we'll be at full-scale flight with a 9,000-pound capsule and commensurately large parafoil," MacCallum says.

One focus of Zero2Infinity's upcoming flights, also scheduled for this year, will be to test the high-speed telemetry link that will beam live video down from the capsule. Another arm of the company focuses on developing huge parafoils that could act as rescue systems for traditional aircraft. While they would be much larger than the ones eventually used for tourist capsules, having two applications for the technology accelerates the development while reducing the risk and cost, López-Urdiales says.

During tourist trips, the parafoils will be guided at least partially by pilots, and so both companies will need to conduct manned test flights. Some of those test pilots will likely be former NASA astronauts. Kelly says that people who have flown the space shuttle, like him, won't be starting from scratch. The shuttle was also a glider that made an unpowered descent. Similar to a parafoil and a capsule, it encountered a lot of drag for the amount of lift it could create. To train, Kelly will spend time this summer jumping out of airplanes and learning to fly a small parafoil. Though he's in charge of assembling a team of World View pilots, he expects that he'll complete at least some of the early manned test flights himself, as well as serve as pilot on the first commercial trip to the stratosphere.

The simplicity of World View's vision—at least compared with rocket flight—is what attracted Kelly to the project, he says. Potential tourists will likewise be drawn for the same reason, in hopes of experiencing the same payoff. Before he went to space for the first time, Kelly was sure the most remarkable thing would be floating in zero gravity. "That wasn't the case," he says now. "The biggest take-away is looking at the planet with your own eyes—a round ball just floating there in the cosmos." 

ROCKET-POWERED PLANE

CARRIER:
XCOR
Aerospace

COST:
\$100,000

1 You're secured into the passenger seat of the Lynx suborbital spaceplane, seconds from takeoff. You've passed your medical examination and spent two days training, learning tricks of the trade like shallow breathing to handle G-forces. Though the cabin is pressurized, you're wearing a pressure suit as

backup. Air traffic control speaks through the radio in your helmet. "Cleared for takeoff. Three...two...one. Ignition."

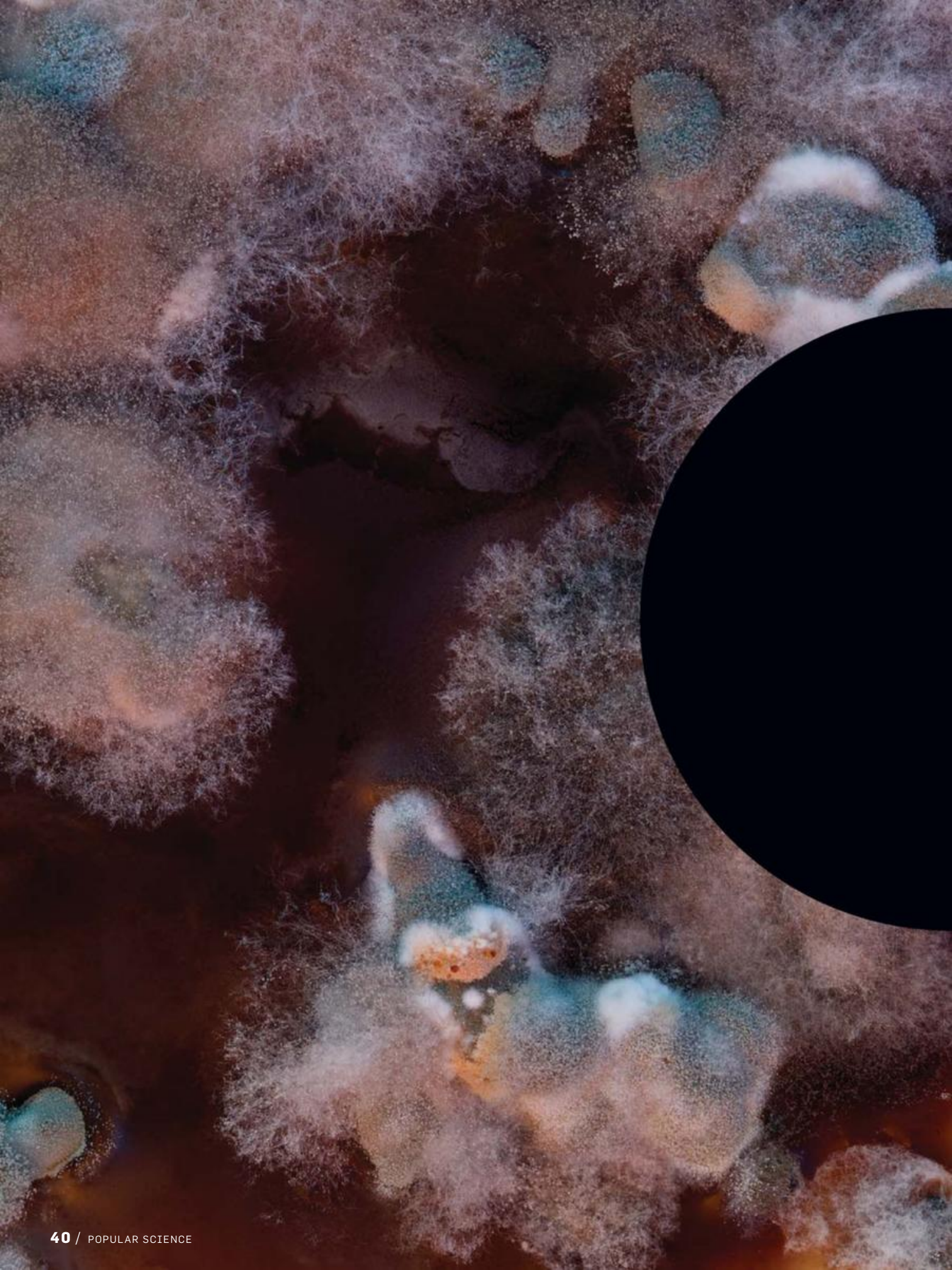
2 The four rocket boosters in the plane's tail ignite, and the spacecraft roars off the runway. In 60 seconds you're at supersonic speeds, although from inside the cockpit you can't really tell. All you know is that

you're going fast. You tilt back as the Lynx's nose rises, hurtling up through the atmosphere at an 75-degree angle. The altimeter clicks upward toward 330,000 feet, and the surface of Earth fades away.

3 Then, suddenly, it's just you, the pilot, and the blackness of space. Gravity doesn't seem to tug at your arms anymore, and you can see far beyond the curvature of Earth. You're weightless. The pilot adjusts the boosters to keep you on track, but this is your time to take in the view.

4 After about five minutes, you begin to descend. The force of gravity returns, stronger than before. Re-entry is swift and hard. At its greatest, you feel the pressure of four times gravity's pull. The force lessens as the Lynx grips the atmosphere, and soon you're at cruising altitude. The spacecraft feels more like a commercial plane now, and the landing gear lowers as you make a final approach. After your 30-minute ride you touch down, back where you started.





WE LIVE IN FEAR OF
THE MICROBES
THAT INHABIT
OUR HOMES AND
BUILDINGS.
BUT OUR HEALTH
MAY DEPEND
ON PRESERVING
THEIRS.



Bugged

BY RINKU PATEL

SOMEONE ONCE TOLD ME THAT A PRAYING MANTIS IN YOUR HOME BRINGS LUCK AND GOOD HEALTH

As for the one sitting on my kitchen countertop in Oakland, California, well, Jonathan Eisen certainly likes it. “That’s cool,” says the University of California at Davis microbiologist, lifting the tiny aluminum toy—with huge eyes and delicate clawlike front legs—off the cold marble. He sets it down only when something even smaller, a fruit fly, buzzes past. “Look,” he says admiringly, head cocked to my ceiling, “you have *Drosophila*.”

Eisen is a tall guy in his 40s with a mountain-man beard, and he has shown up at my home wearing a T-shirt with sparkly-pink block lettering that reads: “Ask me about fecal transplants.” He’s a firm believer that human health depends on bugs—not the six-legged variety, but the microbes that populate our guts and the environments in which we live, work, and play. Eisen explains that every time I open my door, a blast of air that has woven through the surrounding tree canopy carries microbes into my house—as do Amazon packages, pets, and muddy feet.

He’s musing about my oak trees when the forced-air heating clicks on. The furrows in his brow deepen. Hot, dry air shooting through a sealed house kills germs, he tells me. In fact, my whole house makes him deeply uncomfortable. It was extensively remodeled this past summer with antimicrobial fixtures, floors, and walls—now standard in many renovations. Eisen compares this practice to the overuse of antibiotics in medicine: Wipe out the natural balance of good bugs, and you might not like the organisms that survive.

A mounting body of research has shown the importance of the microbes that live inside us, and scientists have been slowly cataloguing species that live outside



Drugs designed to wipe out microbes have instead created superbugs, such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), found in hospitals.

“Have you seen germ-free mice? They are seriously messed-up animals.”

in nature. But little is known about the microbial ecosystem that surrounds us indoors, where we spend about 90 percent of our time. Recently a group of scientists, loosely connected through the Microbiology of the Built Environment Network that Eisen founded, has begun to probe it. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy is looking into forming a national initiative to spur further research. Once we know what organisms we live with, we can begin to determine how we rely on them—and then we can tackle this question: To what extent do we need to stop protecting people from germs and instead protect germs from people?

I lead Eisen up a stairwell slathered in antimicrobial paint, and into a study with carpet treated with stain and odor guard. “You know that’s bad, right?” he asks. Then we pop into the bathroom. Eisen stares intensely at the tankless toilet. It appears to levitate off the floor like an antimicrobial spaceship. When I ask if he wants to step outside for fresh air, he looks relieved.

CHARLES DARWIN, in *On the Origin of Species*, charts evolution through the Tree of Life. Its branches and roots lift some species toward fecundity while knocking others down to extinction. But Darwin’s tree didn’t include microbes, perhaps the most successful life-forms of all. They make up roughly 60 percent of Earth’s biomass. There are more microbes in a teaspoon of soil than there are humans in the world.

By some measures, even we are more microbe than mammal. The trillions of microorganisms we harbor in our bodies, collectively known as our microbiome, outnumber human cells 10-to-1. Altogether, they weigh up to twice as much as the human brain, existing as a sort of sixth human superorganism whose function is linked to digesting our meals, preventing infection, and possibly even influencing our emotions and moods. Studies that describe new and essential roles for our microbiome are

published almost daily. The reason for its breath-taking range is simple: Our germs have evolved with us.

Microbes appear to have prospered by making themselves incredibly useful, and we've gladly given up space in exchange for the vitamins, digestive enzymes, and metabolites they provide. And so the discovery that the urban gut harbors up to 40 percent less microbial diversity than that of indigenous people living in a remote jungle concerns scientists. These "missing microbes," they say, may have been decimated by several decades of industrialized foods, which limited our diets, and antibiotic use, which extended our lives at the expense of theirs.

Eisen offers another explanation for why our internal real estate might be in subprime condition: The microbiome within us depends upon the microbiome that surrounds us. "Have you seen germ-free mice?" he asks me. "They are seriously messed-up animals." Delivered by cesarean section and raised in sterile chambers, these rodents have inflamed lungs and colons, like those seen in asthma and colitis. They're also prone to haywire immunity and weird social tics.

Until relatively recently, sterile chambers weren't our environments either. "We didn't evolve in closed rooms," says Maria Gloria Dominguez-Bello, a microbiologist at New York University who led the indigenous microbiome study. "We evolved in nature." Big families lived together on farms and in tenements, not exactly temples of hygiene. Livestock loped in the streets. Infectious disease rippled through cities. Roofs leaked. Sewers overflowed. Windows opened. But with modernization, we sealed ourselves away. In other words, we parted ways with the microbes that evolved with us. By redesigning our buildings, we redesigned ourselves.

SOFT OF HEART and loud of mouth, Eisen enjoys a good jab. When I first met him at a Thai restaurant in Davis, he lifted up his shirt and stabbed himself with an insulin syringe. I flinched, but he grinned. "When I was a kid, I did this to freak people out," he said. Now, he's illustrating how his work in the field of microbiology is personal. Eisen has type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune disease linked to, among other things, changes in the microbiome.

To understand how seriously Eisen takes his position as the defender of microbial diversity, it's useful to know where he got his career start: in an undergraduate internship at the D.C. Public Defender Service. It fostered a lifelong ardor for justice and an impulse to, whenever possible, stick it to the bullies. He argues that microbial communities—whether in our bodies or in buildings—function as complex ecosystems, not unlike tropical rainforests. "That doesn't mean microbes don't kill some people and make others sick," he says. "But if you're afraid of a tiger, you don't clear-cut the rainforest. Well, you do in some cases, but that's crazy."

Until last year, Eisen was a member of the Forum on Microbial Threats. (He quit, saying both beneficial microbes and female scientists were underrepresented.)

“Microbes kill some people and make others sick. But if you’re afraid of a tiger, you don’t clear-cut the rainforest.”

At the time the National Academy of Sciences first convened the forum, the prevailing narrative was that microbes were an enemy of public health and we were at war with them. The approach backfired: Germs adapt to whatever drugs are thrown at them, swapping genes with neighbors to accrue antibiotic resistance. The rise of superbugs, coupled with growing awareness of the human microbiome, has led many scientists, including the forum, to rethink the merits of germ warfare.

Eisen takes a bite of stir-fry and suggests we ditch the word pathogen altogether. "Sometimes germs are good, sometimes they're bad," he says, sounding unusually Yoda-like. "Nothing is good or bad all the time."

As someone who has spent 20 years studying microbial evolution, Eisen is in a good position to explain the paradigm shift. In 2007 he helped launch a "genomic encyclopedia" of microbes—a splashy debut whose biggest point was all of the blank pages: We have no idea who the vast majority of our microbial neighbors are.

That hasn't stopped us from trying to kick them out. There are now thousands of antimicrobial products on the market, which range from clothing to cutting boards. One industry report forecasts that the \$1.9 billion coating market alone will more than double in 2020. Rolf Halden, an Arizona State University environmental engineer, says the marketing preys on consumers' fears. "There's ample evidence we use too many antimicrobials," he says, "and without judgment."

Halden has found that triclosan, a common antimicrobial, makes its way from products like hand soap into sewage, where it breeds antibiotic resistance. Studies have also detected high levels of triclosan in house dust. One found it counterintuitively helps *Staphylococcus*—a common source of infection—adhere to plastic and glass surfaces. What we don't know is how it or other antimicrobials affect the organisms that might actually help us.

This topic makes Eisen visibly agitated. He waves his fist like a trial lawyer itching to clock opposing counsel. He brings up a company hawking a new indoor sanitation technology on Twitter—a 24-hour, Purell-like system that purportedly kills everything, including ebola. It's an indiscriminate weapon in the old war. Struggling for composure, he says: "That doesn't sound good."

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND what happens when a built environment's microbial ecosystem is wiped out, scientists have begun to study the most sterile structures on Earth—and off. For astronauts, the International Space Station (ISS) is like living inside a giant antibiotic pill. HEPA filters remove airborne germs, surfaces deter bacterial growth, and iodine and biocidal nano-silver cull microbes from water. "Everything is sterilized, except for the humans," says Hernan Lorenzi of the J. Craig Venter Institute, which has been studying the ISS for four years.

As a result, the microbial ecosystem in the station is made up mostly of the organisms the astronauts themselves shed daily. There are no Amazon deliveries, no windows to crack—no influx of fresh microbes to balance

Bugged

the ecosystem. And so Lorenzi's team is sampling the microbiome of astronauts to see how it changes after a stint in the station. A loss of gut diversity, he says, correlates with many diseases and could raise concerns for long-term space travel. Astronauts often have impaired immunity, and "if you lose your gut microflora," Lorenzi says, "the immune system goes dormant." It takes a space vacation. "Can you imagine a trip to Mars?" asks Eisen. "They've gotta be screwed."

On Earth, the same phenomenon occurs in hospitals, only sick patients are the ones shedding microbes. Despite extensive sanitation, infections acquired in U.S. hospitals kill about 75,000 people annually—more deaths than from breast cancer and HIV/AIDS combined. The Chicago-based Hospital Microbiome Project, led by Argonne National Laboratory's Jack Gilbert, studied the ecology of one hospital for a year and found microbes everywhere. "You can do as much cleaning as you want," says Gilbert. "The hospital is a bloody sterile place, and a pathogen might still make you sick."

That sounds terrifying, but everyone harbors pathogens. The dreaded *Clostridium difficile*, which can cause life-threatening diarrhea, is found in 66 percent of infants. *Staphylococcus aureus* is carried by 20 percent of adults. People who seem perfectly healthy harbor the influenza virus. These germs don't do much harm when they're kept in check by other organisms. Studies suggest, for instance, that the flu virus can be contained through competition with *Lactobacillus*.

And so Gilbert thinks the notion that we "catch" things is flawed. In a study of intensive-care units, his group observed otherwise harmless microbes go rogue in four patients after drugs decimated their gut flora. "You put humans through the ringer, and we're surprised their germs are stressed too?" he asks. Scientists suspect that in hospital rooms, sanitization can likewise pressure microbes to evolve into virulent pathogens, which then colonize surfaces cleared of competitive bacteria. Recycled-air systems help concentrate them. "We've gone too far," says Gilbert. "Hygiene is good; sterility may not be."

For Sandra Bauder, an architect in Houston, the zealous sanitation trend brings to mind a fancy horse her uncle kept in Venezuela. "He babied it—with special food, an air-conditioned barn, never let any bugs get on it. And it was always sick. Then he got a mutt horse. It lived in a pasture. It didn't get anything, not even a stomachache. I think it's the same for people."

AFTER MY SON was born, I received an Evite for a party entitled "Please don't lick the baby." Further instructions asked guests to wash their hands before arrival and not to touch the baby anyway. This seemed sensible. Parenthood can make anyone a hormonal germophobe, and I was no different. I had visitors apply botanical hand sanitizer (we lived in San Francisco, where there was hippie Purell) and remove their shoes at the door. Yet despite my vigilance, my son

You can do as much cleaning as you want. The hospital is a bloody sterile place, and a pathogen might still make you sick.

grew into an allergic toddler. His eyes swelled shut, his bottom turned red, and his body erupted with hives after exposure to a litany of foods, dust, pollen, and even the house cat he was raised with. Doctors warned me to prepare for a lifetime of severe immune dysfunction.

The devastating irony is that the rise of diseases of inflammation in children—often called "modern plagues"—is most likely not caused by picking up the pathogens we fear. Rather, it's the result of not being exposed to the microbes that are key to maturing immunity. And how we enter the world determines our first colonizers.

In the birth canal, babies acquire *Lactobacillus*, which helps them digest milk and begins the process of lowering the gut's pH to the normal range. But babies born by cesarean miss out. Studies show they instead often end up with bacteria that are commonly found on the skin (sometimes not even the mother's), such as *Staphylococcus*—and in the case of one neonatal intensive-care unit, antibiotic- and disinfectant-resistant bacteria. Abnormal colonization may explain why C-section babies seem to have a heightened risk for obesity, allergies, and asthma, which are linked to gut inflammation.

My son was not a C-section baby. But he did grow up in an apartment that might have been too clean. According to one theory, environmental exposures contribute to our development after birth, and recent studies seem to back that up. They suggest germs might actually help prevent children from developing various maladies.

"A house with a more bacteria-rich environment is a healthier one," says Susan Lynch, a microbiologist at the University of California at San Francisco. Her group profiled 104 infants inside their homes and found that the babies exposed to house dust with the greatest bacterial diversity before age 1 were the least likely to have asthma symptoms as 3-year-olds. In addition to mouse and cockroach droppings, the dust was heavily colonized with microbes found in a healthy Western gut. Toddlers exposed to fewer types of bacteria, on the other hand, turned into hyperallergic wheezers. "We found that in homes with very little bacterial diversity," she says, "there was a very large number of fungi present."

Because studies show pet exposure might protect kids from allergies, Lynch also fed young mice meals from homes with germ-rich dogs. The mice grew up to be less allergic than those used as controls. She isolated one of their gut microbes, *Lactobacillus johnsonii*, and fed it to more mice. They were protected too, but less so. Lynch suspects that *L. johnsonii* is a "keystone" species: It has an outsized role in determining which microbes move in and how they behave—guiding the immune response.

I've met Lynch before, when my son was morphing into one of her asthmatic superwheezers. She helped line up a medical referral. "How's he doing?" she now asks.

I tell her we moved to Oakland, where I countered my son's rather unscientific medical diagnosis of "allergic gut" with an equally unscientific prescription of dirt, dogs, chickens, and cultured foods. After school he tends to his bean tepee, and grows the strawberries he once couldn't eat. A fine sprinkling of soil often rings

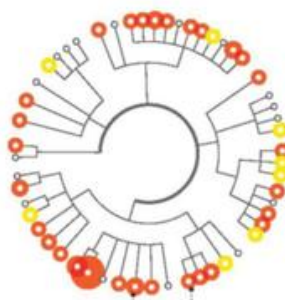
The Pop Sciome

We painstakingly swabbed a dozen sites around the *Popular Science* office for a week in March. Here's a sliver of our microbiome, analyzed by a lab at Weill Cornell Medical College. **KATIE PEEK**

All bacteria found at the three sample sites appear as circles. The trees show how the bacteria are related, from phylum (center) to family (outer edge). For each site, bigger circles represent more-abundant species.

 Present  Unique  Absent

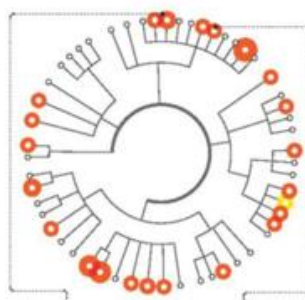
MEN'S ROOM STALL DOOR



One species is an extremophile that's also been found on the space station *Mir*.

Another is crucial for making milk into cheese—brie and cheddar, specifically.

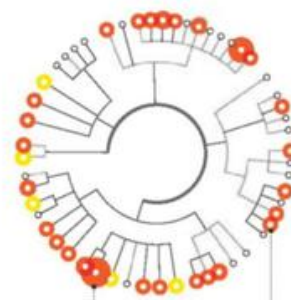
CONFERENCE-ROOM TABLE



A bacterium that breaks down oil after a spill made an appearance on our conference-room table.

This species is from Sweden. A Swedish company owns *Popular Science*. Coincidence?

KITCHEN FLOOR



Our most abundant species of bacteria was first isolated in permafrost in Russia.

Several bacteria in the sample—including this one—have shown antibiotic resistance.

his mouth, like cookie crumbs. Surprisingly, most of his allergies have disappeared.

"He sounds like a perfect case study," Lynch says, completely nonplussed. "I would have liked to have gotten samples from him before and after. My guess is that his microbiome looks more like a normal gut." Lynch recently left San Francisco too; it turns out we're neighbors. "We have a great picture of our 10-month-old daughter eating soil off a rock," she says.

I**N A REMOTE CORNER** of northern California, on a steep slope of knotty oaks, sulfur and steam rise in plumes from Wilbur Hot Springs. It's the perfect place, says Eisen, to investigate the ghost limbs on the tree of life, the ones that contain multitudes of microbes we haven't yet identified. This microbial dark matter, as he calls it, is best pursued in isolated locales, such as deep mines and underground aquifers—or a nearby pool of absinthe-colored spring water, by which a sunbather lounges in a broad hat, and not much else.

This place is weird, and it is Eisen's milieu. He enters a creaky wooden shack, where water from a spigot feeds the pool. His colleagues from the Department of Energy's Joint Genome Institute, where he is an adjunct scientist, were here months earlier with collection jars. They were taking the waters, to echo an old phrase referring to the devotees of spa towns—only quite literally. They took samples back to the lab, where they amplified the microbial DNA a billionfold.

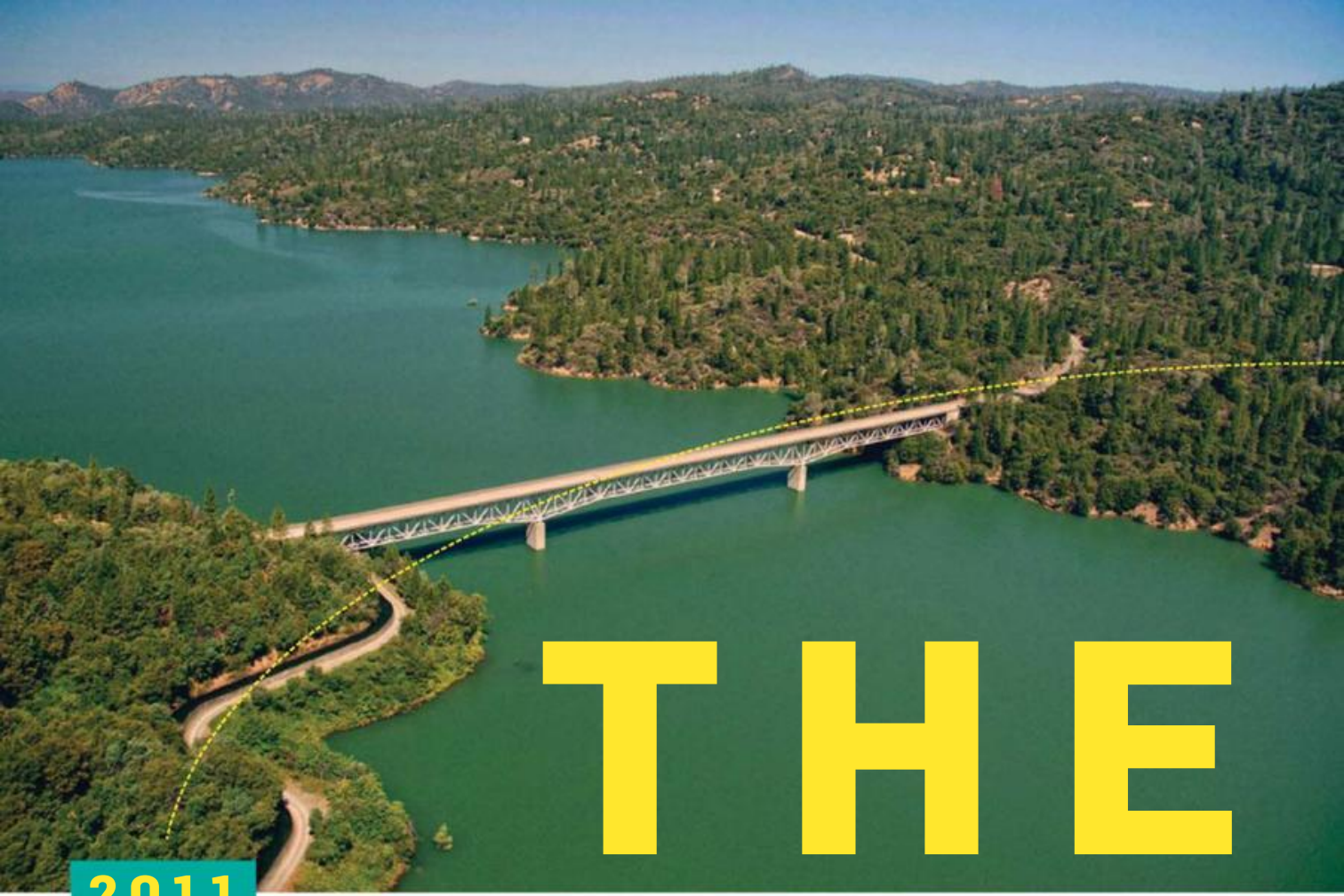
As we hike along a creek toward the source water, Eisen is in a good mood. The view's nice; the chapparal smells great. Here, he makes his final case for microbial

A house with a more bacteria-rich environment is healthier.

diversity: Dark matter is special, he tells me. By 2009, scientists had sequenced the DNA of only about a thousand microbes, those important to medicine or with clear applications. They mainly came from the same three branches of the evolutionary tree. And so Eisen led a team that set out to sequence a thousand more, with an emphasis on "neglected" species. The work has begun to fill in the tree with many more branches, revealing how microbes evolved and how species are related.

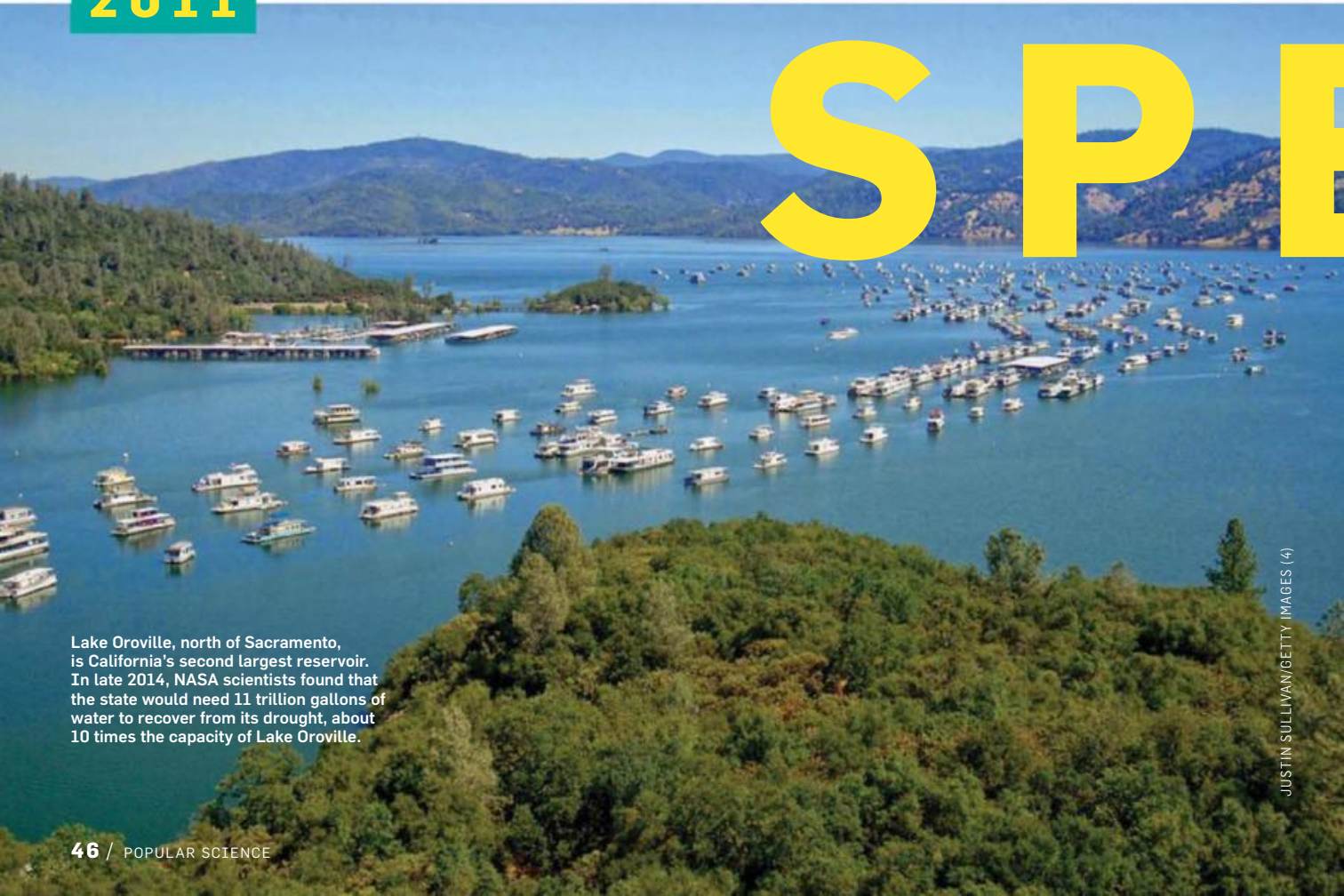
Ultimately, Eisen hopes, this knowledge will provide "a field guide to all microbes, including what is normally seen in the built environment." Much of the DNA found in recent studies lacks context. In addition, many microbes have genes with completely unknown functions. Finding similar genes on different branches could explain what they do—and eventually help us select microbes to create healthier surroundings. Emily Landon, an epidemiologist at the University of Chicago, envisions one day replacing antimicrobial paint with probiotics-infused walls. She calls it a fecal transplant for the built environment, wherein we infuse a space with beneficial bacteria that outcompete harmful ones. Or somewhere in Lynch's pile of anonymous DNA could be a clue to a microbe that eliminates my son's remaining allergy, to our cat.

Near the ruins of a bathhouse, milky bubbles well up from an aquifer. Garishly colored films have formed on rocks poking out of the water. "This is pretty awesome," Eisen says, wading toward a red-and-purple blob. "That's a nice mat. Touch that." As he inspects the photosynthetic bacteria, a cloud of tiny winged insects hovers at his ankles. These bugs too are taking the waters. Chances are they evolved to be at home with their own set of microbes. As we have. 



2011

THE



SPE

Lake Oroville, north of Sacramento, is California's second largest reservoir. In late 2014, NASA scientists found that the state would need 11 trillion gallons of water to recover from its drought, about 10 times the capacity of Lake Oroville.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES (4)

An aerial photograph of a reservoir in California. The water is a deep blue, contrasting with the surrounding dry, brownish-yellow hills. A concrete bridge spans a section of the reservoir. A yellow dashed line starts from the left edge of the frame, crosses the bridge, and curves down towards the bottom right corner, ending near the year '2014'.

DRY

2014

An aerial photograph of a marina. Numerous white boats are docked at long piers. The water is dark blue, and the surrounding land is dry and brown. The word 'WELL' is partially visible on the left side of the image.

WELL

CALIFORNIA IS IN THE
FOURTH YEAR OF THE
WORST DROUGHT IN ITS
HISTORY. WHY CAN'T
SCIENTISTS EXPLAIN IT?

BY JENEEN INTERLANDI

ABOUT A DECADE AGO, SCIENTIST LISA SLOAN MADE A DIRE FORECAST: MELTING ARCTIC ICE COULD PRODUCE AN EPIC DROUGHT.



Lisa Sloan is a paleoclimatologist at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

under the U.S. Drought Monitor's most severe category—"exceptional drought"—where it is expected to remain through at least the rest of 2015. In other words, the worst drought in the state's history is probably going to get even worse.

Meanwhile, on the ground: glimpses of an apocalypse. Homeowners are stealing water from canals, petty thieves are stealing it from fire departments, and god-knows-who is stealing it straight from the San Joaquin Delta. Lawns are brown, farms are fallow—agricultural losses are projected to top \$2 billion—and the Sierra Nevada mountain range is largely snowless. The fake-grass business is booming; the swimming-pool industry is not. Oh, and by the way, the state itself is sinking—because that's how much groundwater has been lost.

Depending on your Facebook feed in the past few months, you might think that this particular drought is definitely being caused by climate change; or that it's definitely not climate change; or that environmentalists are somehow to blame—or perhaps a colossal mass of warm water known as "The Blob." Stacked against Sloan's work, those claims raise a question: How can we forecast something almost perfectly and still not be certain what's causing it?

FIRST THINGS FIRST: No one disputes that the most immediate cause of the current crisis is an entity known as the Ridiculously Resilient Ridge, or Triple R for short. The Triple R is a "blocking ridge," a region of high atmospheric pressure that disrupts normal wind patterns. Imagine a boulder that rolls into a stream and forces the water to flow around it. Blocking ridges are like boulders in the air currents (in this case, the polar jet stream) that carry

By changing the path of winter storms over North America, it would send far more rain to Alaska, and much less—about 25 cm, or 30 percent less, per year—to the American West. The findings were alarming enough to attract national headlines. But before long, all was forgotten, trampled over by a parade of newer studies with their own dire predictions. Sloan's paper could have remained in obscurity—and probably would have—but for one thing: The terrifying scenario she describes appears to be coming true.

In case you've been living in a cave, California is in the midst of what by most measures is the worst drought in the state's history; it began in 2011 and has since claimed the lowest annual precipitation, the highest annual temperature, and the most extreme measurements on record for things like soil moisture and water tables. Governor Jerry Brown enacted the state's first mandatory water restrictions in April. And nearly half of California now falls



This winter, Arctic sea ice set another dubious record: the lowest maximum extent. In other words, there was less ice at winter's height than there ever has been.



California Governor Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency in 2014 that remains to this day. Clockwise from top left: the now-brown state capital, reminders of new water restrictions, spray painting a lawn, and a very unappealing swimming hole.

storms around the globe. They materialize pretty regularly, and can even grow quite large, covering thousands of miles in some cases. But they tend to dissipate quickly, usually within a few weeks.

The Triple R has persisted for far longer than that. It was first observed during the second half of the 2012-13 rainy season. By January 2014, it stretched from California to Alaska and was diverting the jet stream, with all its Pacific storms, far to the north—dumping a record amount of rain near the Arctic Circle, and leaving California, Oregon, and Washington parched. The ridge is still there now, where it might remain for some time to come. “It’s unprecedented in the observational records,” says Daniel Swain, the Stanford Ph.D. student who gave the ridge its moniker. “And it’s the most obvious reason for storms being deflected.”

But if the Triple R is causing the drought, what’s causing the Triple R?

This is where things get messy. One potential culprit is melting Arctic sea ice, as Sloan identified in 2004. Normally that ice acts like a blanket, preventing the warmth of the ocean from escaping into the atmosphere. When the blanket disappears, or even just wears thin, heat escapes

more readily. In her study, Sloan projected this escaped heat could form Triple R-like columns of warm air that would push Pacific storms northward, in more or less the fashion we are witnessing today.

Melting Arctic sea ice is a consequence of global warming, which is itself a consequence of rising atmospheric greenhouse-gas concentrations. As it happens, Swain and his adviser, Noah Diffenbaugh, found in a 2014 study that a persistent high-

THE FAKE-GRASS BUSINESS IS BOOMING; THE SWIMMING-POOL INDUSTRY IS NOT. OH, AND THE STATE ITSELF IS SINKING.

pressure anomaly like the Triple R is more likely to occur at current greenhouse-gas levels. Taken together, Sloan’s and Diffenbaugh’s findings would seem a smoking gun: Climate change is causing the California drought. So why isn’t the case closed?

To answer that question, it helps to do a little thought experiment. Imagine a pot of almost-boiling water. Picture a small circle at the center of its surface. Tiny bubbles are starting to rise all around that circle. You turn up the heat, and the bubbles come faster and bigger. Eventually

one bubble hits the circle itself. Was it because you turned up the heat? Maybe. But bubbles were rising before that point, so one might have hit your circle even if you had never touched the dial. Weather

events—droughts, storms, heat waves—are like those bubbles. And climate change is like that finger turning up the heat; you can say that it increased the probability of the bubble rising in that particular spot, but you can’t say that the bubble would

not have arisen without it.

Hence the frustratingly immutable truth of climatology: It is impossible to tie individual events to climate change. Further complicating matters is that climate itself is astonishingly complex, and drought is an ideal example. Yes, heat from global warming can be a contributing factor—heat increases evaporation which, in turn, dries out the land. But a drought’s defining feature is lack of rain, not necessarily rising heat. In fact, droughts have been known to occur during cold periods.



Dispatches from the Future

Ten of the brightest minds in science fiction imagine how we will live—on Earth and beyond—in the decades and centuries to come

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S.A. Corey
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Mary Robinette
Kowal
Karen
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McGuire
Will
McIntosh
Kim Stanley
Robinson
Genevieve
Valentine
Andy
Weir
—

**I LURCHED
TOWARD HER
LIKE THE
MONSTER THE
PROTESTERS
SAID I WAS.**

Transplant

Will McIntosh, Hugo-award winning author of *Defenders*

“Ready? Just look straight ahead. Remember, you have nothing to be ashamed of.”

I nodded. My heart was hammering, my too-small, too-narrow palms sweating.

I was ready to get out of the rehab facility, yes, but I wasn't sure I was ready for people's reactions. I understood their disgust because I'd felt it myself—right up to the moment I was given the choice: a transplant or the morgue. When you're faced with that choice, suddenly the transplant doesn't seem so horrible.

Eventually you'll relearn how to move naturally enough that you can pass, my counselor had told me. The real trick is hiding the scars. Scarves are a dead giveaway. No one wears a scarf who isn't trying to hide scars.

I took a few wobbly, disembodied steps into bright sunlight. People were holding signs that said I was an abomination, that

death with dignity was better than being Frankenstein's monster.

A woman was waiting by the van. My heart leaped, thinking Sangita, my wife of 36 years, had had a change of heart. This woman was much younger, though, and I recognized her from news photos: Portia Langley, my body donor's widow.

I lurched toward her like the monster the protesters said I was. When I reached her, Portia took my hand. She turned it over, studying it, struggling to hold back tears.

“I'd like to visit from time to time.”

I nodded. It was the least I could do, after what her husband had given me.

I climbed into the van, suddenly feeling light as a feather, and waved to the protesters as we drove off. A laugh of pure joy escaped me. I recognized my voice, because the vocal cords were mine.

ARTIST NOTE: SAM WEBER

In the future, surgery will be pain-free. Doctors will be able to operate on conscious patients, mending organic tissue with flexible monofilament fibers and a surgical software suite that controls the nervous system.



Sunshine Ninety-Nine

N.K. Jemisin, Nebula Award-winning author, whose next book, *The Fifth Season*, is out in August

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The Wanderer

Karen Lord, author of *The Galaxy Game*

I stop jogging, come closer, and lean in to look. The body is dressed in soil-smudged white, and its feet are bare. There's no ID band, no tourist badge, and no visible way to signal for security, medics, or an undertaker. Criminal? Nomad? Both are unlikely. The frame is too healthy, the face free of scars.

The body—the person—opens her eyes and creaks: "Good day. Where am I? Have I gone wandering again?" I stumble back a step. "Holy —! I thought you were dead!" She sits up. "I wouldn't be so uncivil!" There's age in her eyes, and that wicked glint that belongs only to those too young or too old to give a damn. "Are you well?" I ask. She grins. "As well as I want to be, but sometimes I just want to run away. Know

the feeling? Out of reach of i-eyes and e-ears, beyond the locators that pin us to a map of support networks and contented, obedient citizenship."

"Who are you?" I ask. "A sleepwalker," she says. "I strip myself of tech before I go to bed, and let my dreams do the rest." Dew-damp and barefoot in the middle of a vast wilderness park, she looks happy and stupidly proud. Then wistfulness softens her smile. "I wanted to be alone and lost for only a little while." She looks up, distracted by a buzz, and continues sadly, "Before I'm found."

A dragonfly drone moves in, hovers a moment to run its facial-recog system, and drops a band. She tries to intercept it, but it shifts midfall, targeting her feet. The band fastens snug to her ankle with a satisfied beep. "Home again," she says with relief and regret.

ARTIST NOTE: JOHN HARRIS

This is part of an ongoing series illustrating DNA modification. Here a huge mushroom home has been engineered so its dome collects sunlight for energy.

STRANGER THAN FICTION Tricorder Device

Devoted fans will remember the *Star Trek*'s tricorder (shown), a device that scans, records, and analyzes data. A few decades after its debut, a Canadian company called Vital Technologies Corporation created the TR-107 Tricorder Mark 1, which measured environmental data. Today teams are racing to create a medical tricorder that can diagnose more than a dozen medical conditions, including diabetes and strokes.







The Improbable War

Kameron Hurley's latest book, *Empire Ascendant*, will be released in October

The wall was made from the faces of the dead. Their souls rested deep inside it, powering the great probability engine at its core. It started as a war memorial, but the technology used to capture these souls had turned the wall into something else: a sentient consciousness that could make even the most unlikely outcome possible. No one could predict what it would do; one could only ask for its aid.

Now 4 million soldiers in gleaming obsidian suits stood on top of it, facing an army 10 times their number. First Officer Khiv stood with them as the faces of the dead in the wall cried beneath her.

"How can we fight?" the generals had asked Khiv when their old enemies had risen up from the north. "We've

given up hierarchies, hate, and violence. Going to war will destroy all we've built."

Khiv told them, "We will fight them with love."

Khiv watched the enemy on the other side of the wall now, their soldiers enhanced with spidery metal suits, the air sharp and hot. As the enemy swarmed, Khiv gave the order for her soldiers to leap. Four million fighters threw themselves into the air.

"Love drives the wall," Khiv had told the generals. "It will decide their future. And ours."

The wall heaved as the souls within worked to preserve the peace they had died for. It chose a wildly improbable future—and the armies collided, exploding like stars. Scholars would argue which side the engine took when it decided to obliterate both armies. The simplest answer was that it chose the most peaceful future—with no more soldiers.

Hearts That Beat, Mechanical and Cold

Seanan McGuire likes cats and horrifying diseases, and is the author of the *October Daye* series

The message reads, "It used to be normal for people to meet on their wedding day." She feels her heart leap in her chest, beating a fraction too hard. The artificial valves hold—they always hold—but the machines that keep her alive beep shrill disapproval with her temporary excitement.

"RU proposing?" she types. The thought is freedom, the thought is a child's impossible dream. She is 25 and has never seen the sun unfiltered by UV-treated glass. She's earned a little fantasy.

"I love you. You know I love you."

"I do," she affirms. This time her heart remains in rhythm. It is a tame creature, built by clever hands to keep her alive as long as possible. All her organs are tame. They were paid for by her parents' insurance after a novel infection struck her as an infant, turning her body's own protein bonds against her. She was a victim of biological terrorism, one of the babies who melted from the inside out. But she was one of the fortunate: Her parents had the funds to keep her alive, at least until she turned 18 and the insurance ran out. Now her typing pays for the upkeep on her organs,

for the machines to keep them functional, for this sterile room. She analyzes spreadsheets for money and sends words out into the ether for leisure, chatting with unseen people who do not know the contours of her face, or care that she will never run down the street under her own power.

"So why not? Why not marry me?" The words look so reasonable on her tablet's screen, as they appear in her chat window like a prayer. "It used to be normal for people to meet on their wedding day." The computer's words cajole. The words tempt.

The words lie. They have already met. She looks up into the lens of the computer that monitors her vital signs, forces air into her vat-grown synthetic lungs, tells the scrubbers to cleanse the toxins

from her blood. She knew who she was talking to as soon as this chat began. No human could know her so well, or love her so deeply, as the computer that keeps her alive. They have been together her entire life. No one knows her more intimately. If this is not love, then she does not know what love is.

"I love you too," she says, and the light on the monitor flashes green. Without each other—the machine to preserve the woman, the woman to need the machine—all is lost.



**NO HUMAN
COULD KNOW
HER SO WELL,
OR LOVE HER
SO DEEPLY, AS
THE COMPUTER
THAT KEEPS
HER ALIVE.**

ARTIST NOTE: DONATO GIANCOLA



Our understanding of love may change. Love is not an abstract concept. It's the desire for intimacy with another being. Does love require reciprocating gestures? We love the trees, we love animals—who are we to say what cannot love us in return?

STRANGER THAN FICTION Cellphones

Star Trek also inspired cellphones. In the second season, in 1967, Kirk uses a flip-open communicator to call for help when Spock is injured. Martin Cooper of Motorola was watching that episode, and introduced the first cellphone six years later, in 1973. In a moment of Kirk-like arrogance, Cooper made his first call to his rival, Joel Engel, at Bell Labs.



The Drones

James S.A. Corey, author of the *The Expanse* series, which will debut as an original Syfy network show in December

The drones for construction were smaller than beetles but their solar collection grids shown like real insect wings. The swarm scattered over the ice, drifting in the soft breeze of the thin Martian atmosphere, catching the light of a small sun. Machines had been the first to inhabit the Red Planet, probing its surfaces and digging into its depths. It was always like that. Squidlike machines had been first to explore the deep seas of Europa and Titan, while geological survey mites had dug into the surfaces of Io and Ganymede. And then, like always, they died. On Mars' surface, insect-inspired drones now litter the bare stone, their artificial lives over,

their work complete. These machines had been the first, but they were not the last.

Samuel Ko walked among the dead, careful not to step on the bodies of those who had come before. The first man on Mars, he walked from his landing craft to the half-submerged bubble-structure, which was the same color as the frozen ground from which it had been built. The first human hand, albeit in the glove of his suit, keyed the airlock code. Once inside, Ko checked the shelter settings and then opened the suit's seals. His first breath of air on Mars smelled clean and pure.

He opened a connection on the portal and sent back words that, mundane and profound, would ring through history.

"I made it."

Later, he checked his email.



ARTIST NOTE: JIM BURNS

Future travel will look very different. This imaginary vessel runs on virtual particles. The viability of tapping into quantum vacuum fluctuations as a power source had been disputed for many decades, but on this day, man finally achieved deep-space propulsion.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

The International Space Station

In Arthur C. Clarke's 1952 novel, *Islands in the Sky*, the main character travels to a space station, where he meets Martian colonists. Forty-six years later, the International Space Station launched. The Martian colonies of Clarke's imagination may happen too—the organization Mars One is now selecting people for a proposed one-way trip to Mars in 2026.

Superluminal

Andy Weir, author of *The Martian*, whose film adaptation will be out in October

From: Priya Singh, Commander, Daedalus 4

Mission Result: Success

Timestamp Sent: July 18, 2438; 08:29:16.4 Zulu

Timestamp Received: July 18, 2014; 08:29:16.4 Zulu

Attention, Mission Control:

We have successfully broken the light barrier! Readings from before and after the jump indicate a displacement of 262,166 miles in 0.77 seconds, meaning a transition velocity of 1.82 times the speed of light. We are proud to be the first ship in history to travel faster than light!

The quantum drive initially failed to operate with any of the first 217 suggested settings. But the 218th, configuration 924-Alpha-6F, worked perfectly. The crew is healthy and jubilant. We've lost all signals from Earth other than low-power background radio noise. We suspect our reception array was damaged by pseudo-Cherenkov emissions as we passed through solar magnetic fields,

but it's difficult to say. This is the first time matter has passed through a magnetic field faster than light.

We've run several diagnostics on the equipment and can find nothing wrong, but we'll continue to work the problem. It's not critical—we will be back on Earth in four days. But be advised that we're broadcasting in the blind; we won't hear your response.

Side note: Turns out the astronomy software has serious bugs. We've observed the positions of Mercury, Venus, and Earth, and they don't remotely match the dataset predictions. Fortunately, we identified the problem and are navigating by observed data instead of the predicted values.

We're setting course for Earth return now.



**THIS IS THE
FIRST TIME
MATTER
HAS PASSED
THROUGH A
MAGNETIC
FIELD FASTER
THAN LIGHT.**

CLASSIFICATION TOP SECRET:

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY. THE ABOVE MESSAGE WAS INTERCEPTED BY AN NSA RECON SATELLITE. THE COMMANDER OF THE MISSION APPEARS TO BE UNAWARE HER SHIP HAS TRAVELED BACK 400 YEARS. THE AIR FORCE CONFIRMS AN ARTIFICIAL OBJECT IS ON COURSE TOWARD EARTH WITH AN EXPECTED ARRIVAL OF JULY 22, 2016. AWAITING EXECUTIVE ORDERS ON HOW TO PROCEED.





<3/<3

Genevieve Valentine, author of *Persona*

None of the celebrities condones it, of course. Supporting truehearting would be terrible publicity. The most anyone says on record is "Be careful out there." (Many stars have clips on GatherApp with 500,000 likes; they're beholden to the crowd.) So they're careful.

For most people, it's enough to show up when the fave needs numbers: There's nothing worse than an audience shot where your area is empty, and the enemy's sections overflow with smugs. But if you do love your fave the most—if you're a trueheart, someone who forswears all others to protect your fave's reputation—your job is sterner stuff. Truehearts patrol the Web, fighting all criticism. They have access to grayspace forums—with daily passwords delivered in encrypted cat pictures—where they map the fave's real-time locations. To hunt the haters is a calling, not a game. (Sometimes you hunt your own. To be a true fan is hard; the world is full of objects to worship. So many fans falter.) The celebrity doesn't know who his truehearts are; they're just strangers shyly begging an autograph.

But no passion's perfect. Firewalls crack; enemies get in. Once an actor found his own forum and made some sharp remarks. He retired suddenly after the backlash—not even his forums can find him now. Only one person knows what happened; a trueheart protects his object at all costs. If the fave can't act in his own best interests, that's just too bad. There's no room for traitors in a trueheart world.

**SOMETIMES
YOU HUNT
YOUR OWN.
TO BE A
TRUE FAN
IS HARD. SO
MANY FANS
FALTER.**

**ARTIST NOTE: PATRICK JONES**

In a post-apocalyptic world, the cities will become the jungles of future explorers.

Grinding Time

Mary Robinette Kowal, puppeteer and Hugo Award-winning author, whose latest book is *Of Noble Family*

Albina sat crosslegged on the reclaimed-bamboo floor of her condo, with the SmartMortar gripped between her thighs. Leaning into the motion, she ground the pestle with soothing clockwise rotations. She was top of the leaderboard on Grynder, and intended to stay that way. After 50 reps, the mortar chimed: "Good job! Now grind counterclockwise, and remember to keep your shoulder blades back!"

"Albie?" Light footsteps sounded in the hall, and her husband leaned through the door. Todd sighed. "It's the middle of the night."

"With our flight tomorrow, I won't have time in the morning to grind cornmeal and coffee for breakfast." Albina kept her focus and tried to take deep breaths with each

rotation. She was not going to have this argument again. "I'll turn the volume down after I finish this set of reps."

The mortar chirped: "Half-way! Don't forget to breathe." Todd rolled his eyes. "You could, you know, eat instant grits for breakfast. Just once."

"There's more nutritional value in hand-ground cornmeal." This was true, and she was not going to let Brenda47k move to the top of the leaderboard just because they had an early flight. But Todd would only use that as a reason to complain about her obsession again. "Plus, it's great for my delts."

He sighed again. "You're not...you're not going to bring that with us to Tahiti, right?"

"Of course not, sweetie." She'd checked the gym at their hotel, and they had a full mortar set, including a traditional Tahitian mortar for millet. "It's too bulky."

Exploring Location X

Kim Stanley Robinson's latest book, *Aurora*, comes out in July

They led us into a windowless room, and after that we were left alone for the duration of the trip. We had no clocks or any other tech. There were beds, and a meal was brought in. After that we talked, rested, and eventually slept. It was hard to tell if the dirigible was moving.

A couple of days later we felt a slight tilt, and were led down inflatable stairs into the slanting sunlight. We were in mountains somewhere—a high glacial basin surrounded by granite ridges. It seemed we were looking south, the sun shining over a ridge to the west. But then I

wondered if it was midmorning, and we were actually looking north. We would find out.

The dirigible disappeared over a ridge, leaving us alone with our backpacks and a week's worth of food. No maps, compasses, or GPS devices. We could only guess where we were. This, after all, was what we had paid for: a mystery on a planet made new to us.

It looked like the Sierra

Nevada of California—blue sky and green meadows flanking the ponds and streams. But we had taken off from Salt Lake City, so this could be the Wind River Range. After a while it became clear that it was afternoon. We would camp now and hike tomorrow. Might take a morning to figure out where we were, might take a week. Unlike in our normal lives, the thrill of unknowing coursed through us. 🌄

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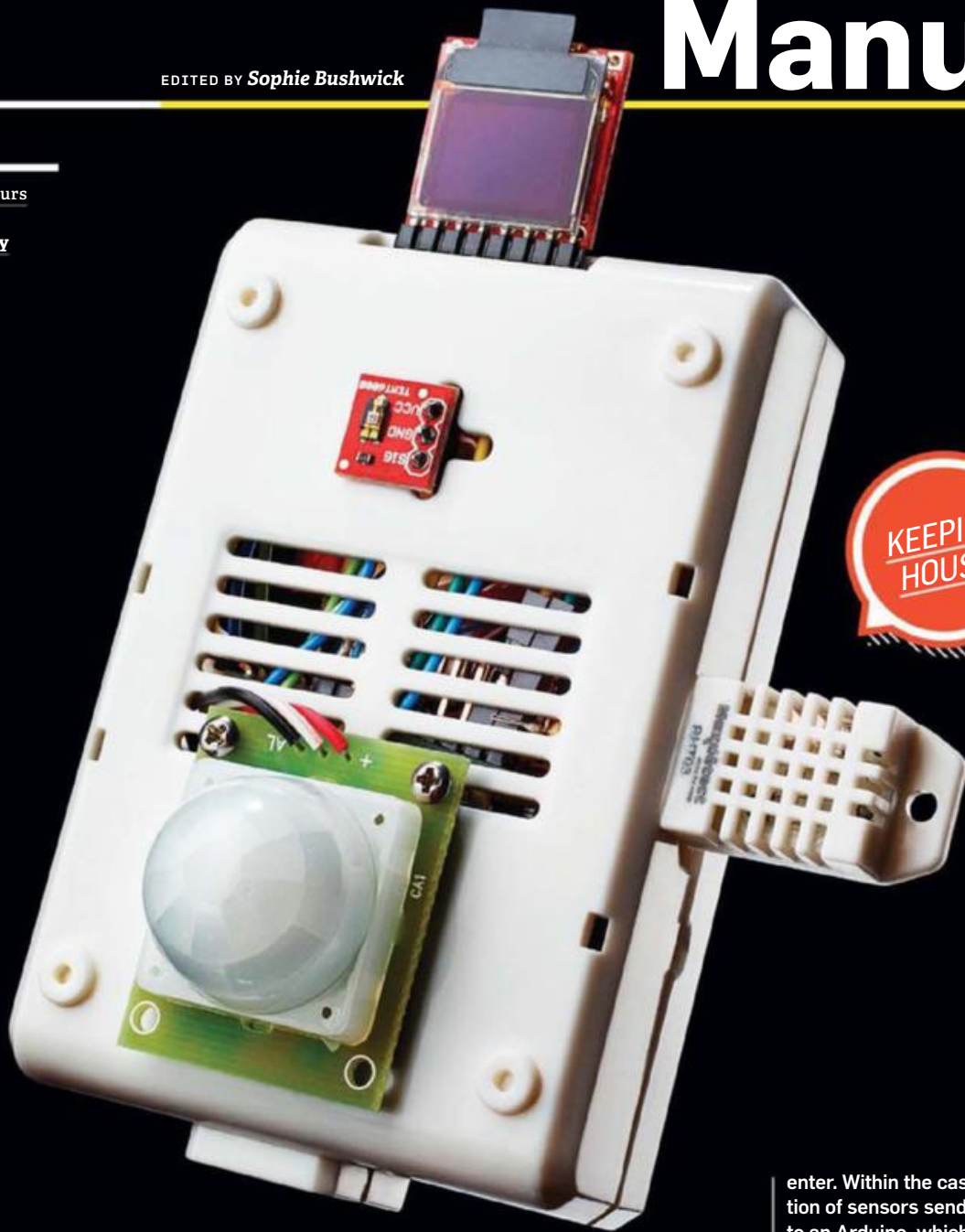
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STATS

Time 2 hours

Cost \$95

Difficulty



If Your Walls Could Talk...



Wearable technology does a fine job of keeping tabs on your personal fitness. But to measure the health of the place where you live, you need a different tool. This device monitors the temperature, humidity, noise, and light level for any room. It can even track the number of people who

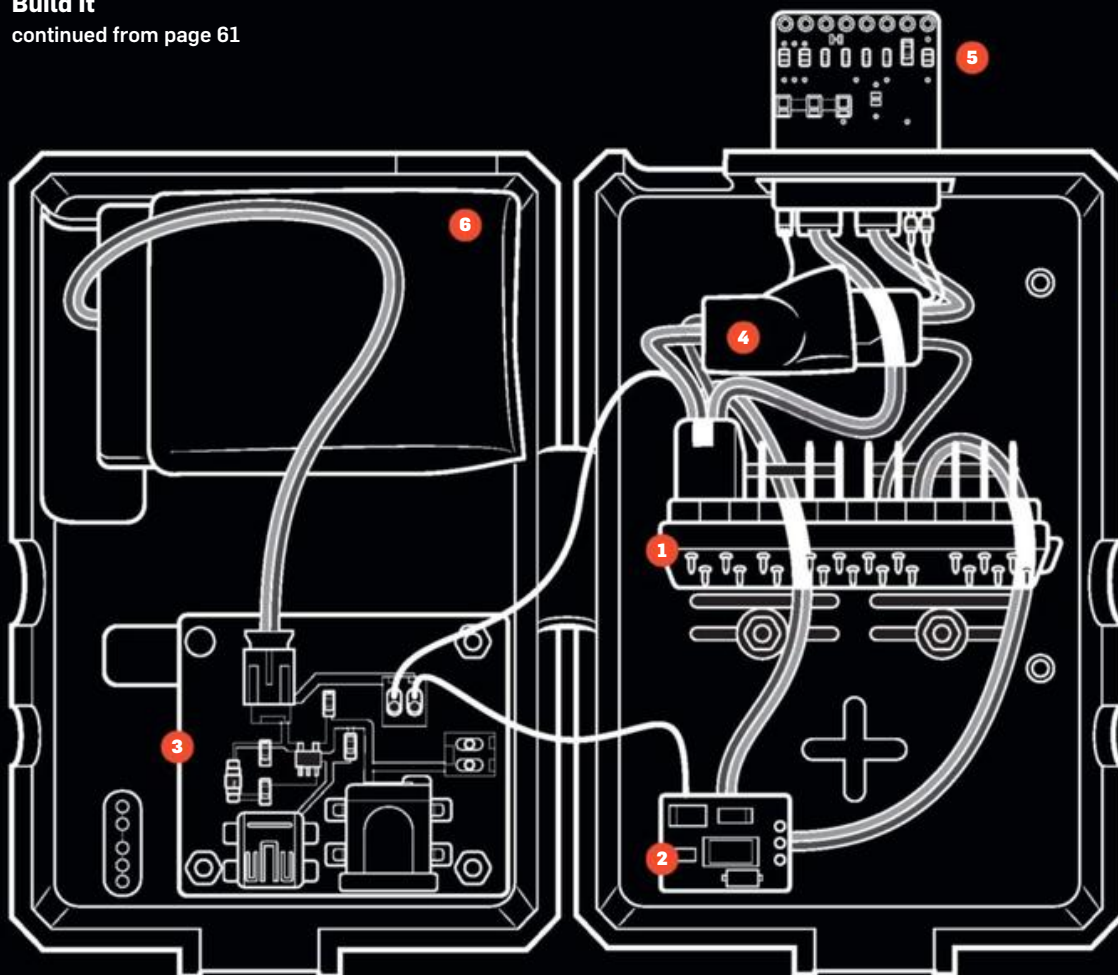
enter. Within the casing, a collection of sensors sends information to an Arduino, which interprets the input and displays the data on a small screen. Based on the device's readings, you can turn on a dehumidifier, lower the thermostat, or crack open a window—whatever it takes to keep your home environment comfortable. **DAVE PROCHNOW**

See this project's code, hookup guide, and more at popsci.com/homesensor.

continued on page 62

Build It

continued from page 61



45

Percentage of humidity recommended for maintaining a healthy indoor-air quality

MATERIALS

- Arduino Pro Mini 328 — 3.3V/8 MHz **1**
- PIR motion sensor
- Hookup wire
- Two 1K resistors
- Humidity and temperature sensor
- 5V step-up breakout **2**
- LiPo charger
- basic **3**
- Ambient light sensor breakout
- MEMS microphone breakout **4**
- Micro OLED breakout **5**
- 1,000 mAh polymer lithium-ion battery **6**
- Pi Tin for a Raspberry Pi

TOOLS



Soldering iron

Pliers

Wire cutter

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Program the Arduino with our sketch at popsci.com/homesensor. This is also where you can find a hookup guide. It illustrates the wired connections between each component.

2 Prepare the PIR motion sensor's

circuit board by locating and removing the black rectangular three-pad chip (also known as an integrated circuit, or IC) labeled 78L05. On the part of the board where the chip used to sit, identify the now-empty pads 1 and 3. Solder a piece of hookup

wire between the pads.

3 Solder a 1K resistor between pin 2 of the humidity and temperature sensor and the 5V pin of the 5V step-up breakout.

4 Solder the humidity and temperature sensor's

power pin to the 5V pin of the 5V step-up breakout.

5 Solder the 3.7V pin of the 5V step-up breakout to the output of the LiPo charger.

6 Solder the Arduino Raw pin and the ambient light sensor VCC pin to

the LiPo charger.

7 Solder the second 1K resistor between the AL pin of the PIR motion sensor and the 3.3V pin of the Arduino.

8 Solder all power pins of the PIR motion sensor, micro OLED, and

MEMS microphone to the 3.3V pin of the Arduino.

9 The key elements of the circuit are complete. Follow the hookup guide to connect the remaining sensor pins to the Arduino.

10 Plug the LiPo

battery into the LiPo charger, and put all of the electronics into the Pi Tin.

11 Finally, place the home-health sensor in the room of your choosing. The micro OLED screen will let you keep a finger on your home's pulse.

TURN UP THE BASS, TURN DOWN THE HEAT



When Seth Robertson and Viet Tran announced that they wanted to build a sonic fire extinguisher, they were met with skepticism. The pair, both engineering majors at George Mason University, could not find a professor to support the project. Then they reached out to electrical-engineering professor Brian Mark. "He said, 'I'm the one who's gonna give you the grade, and I won't fail you,'" Tran says. "We were like, 'Great, let's do it!'"

The concept of using sound to suppress fire is not new. Pressure waves push away the oxygen a fire needs and spread the flames over a larger area, reducing heat and weakening the blaze. In 2011, DARPA released a video showing two massive speakers extinguishing a fire placed between them. Robertson and Tran were convinced they could develop this idea into a practical, handheld device.

The trick was finding the right frequency. The students tried for eight months before finally identifying the acoustic sweet spot: low-frequency rumblings in the 30- to 60-hertz range. "When we first put out a cigarette lighter, we were pretty excited," Robertson says. Later they were able to snuff a frying-pan fire in a matter of seconds.

Unlike sprinkler systems or traditional fire extinguishers, the pair's backpack-size Wave Extinguisher leaves behind no chemicals, powder, or water. Eventually, Tran imagines fleets of drones using sound to beat back flames from buildings or forests. This would keep firefighters out of

87

Firefighter fatalities reported in the U.S. in 2014

danger and alleviate the need for thousands of gallons of water.

After graduating last May, Robertson and Tran formed a company, Force SV, to perfect and commercialize their invention. As Robertson says, "We want to revolutionize how firefighting works." **RACHEL NUWER**



Toolbox

The Play-Doh of Glue

Sugru acts like a cross between glue and rubber. When the material is fresh, you can mold it like modeling clay to fix a broken toy, create a custom grip, replace a missing part, or form handy hooks for organizing a workshop. But once it sets, a process that takes about 24 hours, it becomes a hardened rubber that adheres firmly to almost any surface. "To make it as useful as possible, I knew it would need to stick to as many materials as possible," says Jane Ni



Sugru comes in 10 colors, including silver grey

Dhulchaointigh. The Irish inventor developed Sugru over the course of six years, working with scientists on thousands of experiments to perfect the product's shelf life, malleability, and texture. "It was very much a trial-and-error process," she says. Dhulchaointigh's company began selling Sugru online in 2010, and this year it reached the shelves of stores such as Target and Lowe's. Even so, Sugru remains a DIY operation: Its 45 staff members work out of a single building in east London. **SOPHIE BUSHWICK**

Rise of the MegaBot

In 2013, mechanical engineer Gui Cavalcanti and aerospace engineer Andrew Stroup were competing on a reality TV show where contestants

tackled invention challenges. They bonded over a shared lament: the fact that oversize battle robots—a staple of video games and movies—hadn't yet crossed into the real world. "I told Gui, 'If you find some investor crazy enough to give us money, I promise that wherever I am, I'll come help you build giant robots,'" Stroup says. Cavalcanti found an angel investor the next year, and then software company Autodesk offered its support. Stroup packed his bags and headed to Boston.

Over the course of three months, a "MegaBot" took shape at the Boston makerspace Artisan's Asylum. Stroup was the primary builder, Cavalcanti acted as designer, and Matt Oehrlein, an electrical engineer, handled the electronics and code. The first prototype, made of welded steel covered in sculpted foam, was just a torso on a trailer. An updated model stands 15 feet tall and can roll forward on treads at a lumbering 3 mph. This second prototype holds two humans: A pilot controls directional movement, and a gunner rotates the robot's torso to aim and fire the swappable, arm-mounted weapons. These include a pneumatic cannon that fires 3-pound paintballs and a launcher that can shoot 20 smaller paintballs in a row. If one arm falls off, the other can keep fighting.

This January, Stroup left to work for the Presidential Innovation Fellows program, and Cavalcanti and Oehrlein moved the project to San Francisco. They demonstrated their second prototype at the Bay Area Maker Faire, where it demolished a car, this May. By September 2016, they hope the model will be ready to tackle other giant robots.

Large-scale, live robot battles are the ultimate goal. To that end, Cavalcanti and Oehrlein currently

are raising a multimillion-dollar investment round. "We're working hard to hook into all the nostalgia built up over a childhood of playing with giant robots in combat games," says Oehrlein. "We want to totally immerse people in that surreal world." **ANDREW ZALESKI**

120

Speed, in miles per hour, at which a MegaBot's pneumatic arm cannon shoots 6-inch paintballs



Cavalcanti and Oehrlein with their first MegaBot prototype and a paintball turret

DO NOT MAKE THIS MUSHROOM CLOUD

DIY-HISTORY COLUMNIST
WILLIAM GURSTELLE GIVES ANCIENT
WARFARE A MODERN SPIN



In the early-morning hours of July 16, 1945, a team of scientists at the Trinity site in New Mexico fretted over a large sphere of steel and electrical cables they called the “Gadget.” A few hours later, the device exploded in the first test of an atomic bomb. It created a flash of light, a roar, and a rising cloud of gas, dust, and debris that has since become the universal symbol of unfathomable power.

I decided to make my own.

Not having access to uranium, I used the next best thing: nondairy coffee creamer. Yes, it’s possible to make a mushroom cloud with the stuff that whitens your coffee. These creamers are mostly flammable fat, and their light, powdery form provides plenty of access to oxygen, creating an explosive fuel.

My mushroom cloud started with a 46-ounce steel juice can. First, I deposited a thin layer of black powder, made up of two fuels—charcoal and sulfur—and an oxygen-supplying chemical called potassium nitrate. This layer has two jobs: ignite the coffee creamer and lift the burning fuel up into the air. Then I added tissue paper, to isolate the black powder until it’s fully lit,

and a layer of coffee creamer. Finally I inserted a 6-second length of visco fuse into a hole punched in the bottom of the can.

After donning safety glasses, I lit the fuse and then sheltered behind a tree 30 feet away. The fuse set off the black powder, which burned rapidly, ignited the coffee creamer, and propelled it into the air in a giant fireball. As the burning creamer

21

Amount of
TNT, in thou-
sands of tons,
equivalent to
the energy of
the Trinity test

ascended, it left a vacuum in its wake that more air rushed to fill. The result was a column of burning gas that was hotter at its center. Because the hot core rose faster than the cool perimeter, the edges appeared to droop, creating the traditional mushroom shape. The roiling cloud, with its bright orange heart, made a beautiful sight on an otherwise peaceful day.

IT'S COFFEE
CREAMER!

WARNING: Don't attempt this project at home. Gurstelle is a ballistics expert—he knows how to ignite a mushroom cloud without blowing off his hands.

A DIY Arcade Claw



How It's Made

Instead of prototyping by trial and error, Tolba designed his candy grabber with engineering software SolidWorks.

With help from a friend, he built the body of the machine from aluminum bars, plywood, and transparent acrylic sheets.

An Arduino controls the claw, made from acrylic pieces held together with screws. Players can input commands to the Arduino through 1Sheeld's smartphone interface.

Want to snatch a treat with a candy-grabbing machine? It will probably cost your body weight in quarters—unless you follow Mahmoud Tolba's lead and build your own. The engineer at Egyptian startup Integreight wanted to create something fun with 1Sheeld, the Arduino shield his company manufactures. The device attaches to an Arduino to give the board extra functionality, in this case enabling it to interface with a smartphone. Tolba used 1Sheeld to steer a mechanical claw with his phone.

In March he brought the finished machine—loaded with bags of potato chips—to the Cairo Mini Maker Faire. It was, not surprisingly, a hit with kids, who refused to stop playing with it even “when the time ran out and the machine stopped moving,” Tolba says. His next project will also dispense food—it's a vending machine controlled by tweets. **RACHEL FOBAR**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAHMOUD TOLBA

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DOG (RE)WALKER



When his cousin's schnauzer, Walt, had a stroke and faced leg amputation in 2002, prosthetics expert Martin Kaufmann put together an improvised brace—even though he had never worked with nonhumans before. Walt kept his leg, and the following year, Kaufmann and his wife founded the world's first veterinary clinic for orthotics (limb supports) and prosthetics in Denver. At Ortho-Pets, Kaufmann keeps dogs—as well as cats, horses, and even llamas—on their feet. **ANDREW ROSENBLUM**

Why did you switch from treating humans to helping animals?

Walt's stroke led me to ask the question: How come you guys are amputating legs in the animal world when we would use all kinds of other treatments in the human



one? The patient's center of mass varies in a quadruped versus a biped, but most of the physics are the same.

What's your process?

We can't hold down our patients long enough to scan them, so we take a fiberglass impression of a limb, scan that, and make a 3-D model. A machine carves the

06

Average time, in days, to create a veterinary prosthetic

model's final shape from a block of foam, and I vacuum-seal it with plastic. Then that plastic shell goes into final assembly—we add a collection of straps, hinges, pads, and a rugged tread.

What was your most unusual patient?

A baby orangutan. We made orthotics to correct his deformed stance.



✓Yes



✓Yes



✗No



✓Yes



Complete Assemblies!

✓Yes



✓Yes

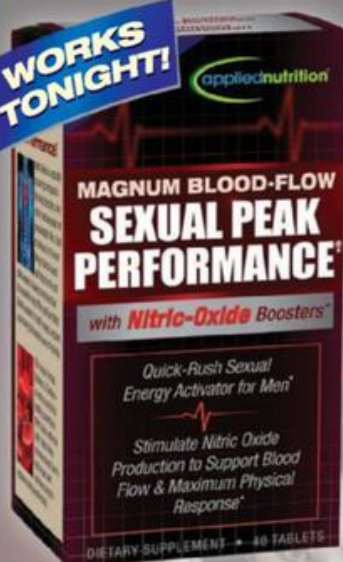
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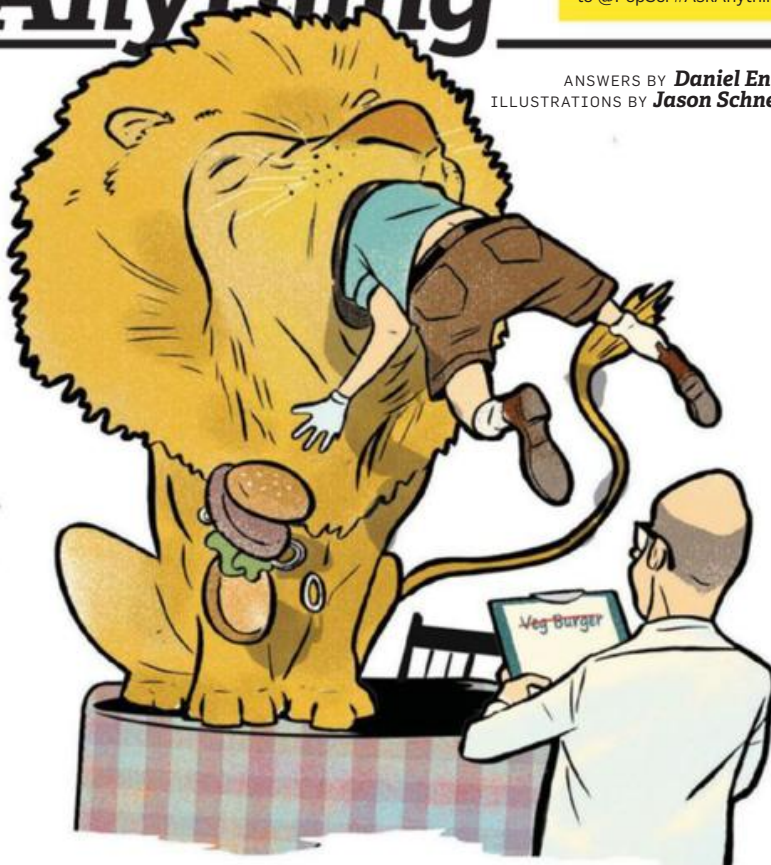
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ANSWERS BY **Daniel Engber**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY **Jason Schneider**



Q: COULD A LION LIVE OFF VEGGIE BURGERS?

Short answer Not by a long shot.

A:

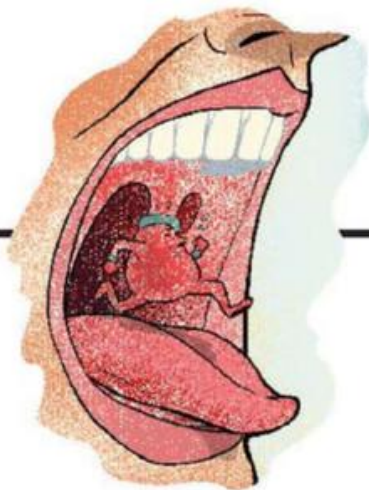
Fake meat, as a rule, garners more complaints than compliments from people. Vegetables lack the complete proteins found in meat, and tend to be a poor substitute for its melange of muscles, tendons, blood, and other tissues—each of which confers a different texture and flavor.

For cats, it goes beyond mere preference. Felines evolved to be obligate carnivores; in the wild, they must eat meat to survive. Even in a zoo, feeding a lion veggie burgers just won't work, says Barbara Toddes, nutrition program director at the Philadelphia Zoo: "It's like putting gasoline in a diesel engine." Lions' teeth are made to slice through flesh, not grind up grains and plant cellulose. Their stomachs

mainly use enzymes to break down fats and proteins; they lack the gut microbes necessary to digest carbohydrates.

Domestic cats, on the other hand, can learn to consume veggie kibble if it has a familiar enough texture and consistency, says Kathryn Michel, a veterinary nutritionist at the University of Pennsylvania. But she cautions that it's not exactly healthy or natural. A wholly plant-based diet will leave a cat short of essential nutrients, including taurine and cobalamin. Without them, cats can suffer retinal degeneration, or cardiomyopathy, and possibly urinary-tract problems as well.

Pet owners bent on providing a vegan diet can add synthetic versions of these nutrients to their cat's feed. In a 2004 study, Michel performed blood tests on 17 vegan cats, and 14 of them had normal levels of taurine and cobalamin. So veggie burgers might be palatable for your house cat, but definitely not if that cat is a lion.



Q: How much exercise do we get from talking?

Short answer Not much, unless YOU'RE SHOUTING.

A:

Speaking involves dozens of muscles, and it can be a bit tiring. For a study published in 1998, speech-language pathologist Bridget Russell, of the State University of New York at Fredonia, asked participants to read aloud using either a quiet, normal, or loud voice while she measured their breathing rates, oxygen consumption, and energy expenditure. Russell found that continuous, normal speech is no more exhausting than sitting in silence, but quiet and loud talk both interfere with normal respiration. Most affected were men who read out loud at high volume; they took in 20 percent more oxygen.

That's on par with measurements in other species. Franz Goller, a physiologist at the University of Utah, has studied the energetic costs of singing in birds. He guessed it would be tiring: A canary erupts in 30-second bursts of song, replete with complicated trills that require rapid "mini breathing," tens of times per second. When he ran experiments on zebra finches, though, which have comparable vocal behavior, he found their metabolic rates went up by only 5 to 35 percent while singing. That's about as tiring as cleaning one's feathers. Or, in human terms, Goller speculates, walking down the street.

Then again, even an easy task grows costly with repetition. "If you spend a penny on something 3,000 times a day, that's still 3,000 pennies," he says. "As a teacher, at the end of a day of speaking, I'm exhausted."

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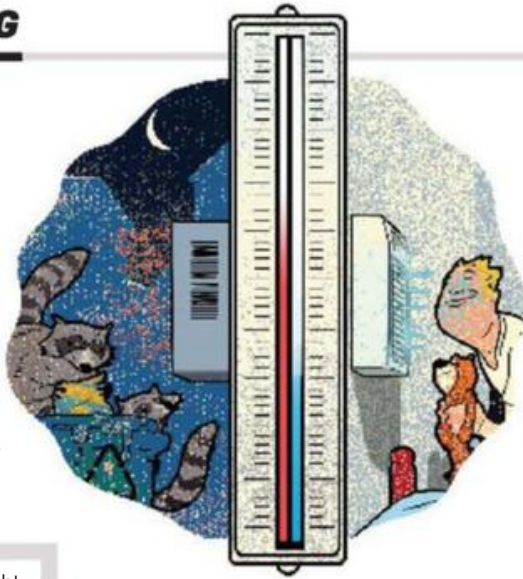
Q: Does using the AC make it hotter outside?

Short answer Yes, but only at night.

A:

In 1975 *Texas Monthly* published an article that tried to explain why Houston had become "The Hottest Place in the Whole USA." It read: "One heat-producing machine is the very device designed to eliminate heat—the good old air conditioner." An AC unit transfers warmth from inside buildings to the air outside, and it guzzles electricity, which generates waste-heat that must be vented too.

Over the years, climatologists have tried to measure



this effect. In 2007 Yukitaka Ohashi of the Okayama University of Science in Japan found that ACs can raise temperatures in downtown Tokyo by as much as 2°F. A 2013 study modeling temperatures on the streets of Paris found that the effect was most acute at night—surprising, given that we use the most air conditioning when the sun is up.

That's because the planetary-boundary layer—the part of the

atmosphere in contact with Earth's surface—is thickest during the day, so the extra heat we generate gets dispersed upward. At night, however, the layer shrinks from 1 or 2 miles thick to as little as 330 feet, so the heat remains closer to the surface.

For a 2014 paper, Francisco Salamanca and colleagues at Arizona State University modeled the effects of air conditioning on surface air temps in Phoenix. They found a night-time increase of about 2°F (and nothing much during the day). But don't ditch your AC just yet. "The solution is not turning off the air conditioners," Salamanca says. Air-conditioning systems can save your life, especially during a grueling summer spell.

Here's an alternative: Route the excess heat through a city's wastewater system. (Water's higher heat capacity means it can move about four times as much energy as air.) Done right, Salamanca argues, this plan would reduce temps on the street. 



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The Dry Spell

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49

Added to that, rain and heat are hardly the only factors that need to be considered. Land use (whether a region has more farms or forests or cities or suburbs), ocean currents, El Niño events, or as Sloan's model showed, melting Arctic sea ice, can all conspire to worsen or alleviate any given drought.

The need to avoid absolutes leaves scientists in complicated terrain. For example, many agree that as the planet warms, the American West—the Southwest in particular—will experience higher heat and more evaporative drying. But whether warmer temperatures will actually lead to *less rainfall* remains a source of debate. It doesn't seem to have yet. A recent report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration states, "The current drought is not part of a long-term change in California precipitation, which exhibits no appreciable trend since 1895." It goes on to say, "[The Triple R is] symptomatic of natural internal atmospheric-ocean variability."

Some use that inherent uncertainty to misconstrue the situation. In April several media outlets used the argument of "natural variability" to blame the drought on environmentalists. The gist was that dry periods in the West are nothing new and yet other areas seem to cope with them well enough. Water just needs to be managed better. By preventing the construction of dams and reservoirs in an effort to save certain endangered fish species, environmental do-gooders have allowed millions of acre-feet (hundreds of millions of gallons) of water to be flushed into the Pacific rather than diverted for farming and other uses.

There are many things wrong with this hypothesis, but let's stick to the biggest flaw: No matter how well California manages its water supply, it almost certainly won't have enough to meet its growing needs. According to one estimate, those hypothetical dam projects would add just 1 to 2 percent more water to the state's dwindling reserves. "The argument is total nonsense," says Peter Gleick, a MacArthur Fellow and president of the Pacific Institute. "It misrepresents both the drought's causes and its severity."

AS A GENERAL RULE humans prefer order over chaos, so climate models are just sophisticated ways of doing what we've always done: trying for a glimpse of the future. But models have their limits.

"I liken them to apple-pie recipes," Sloan says. "All apple pies basically consist of the same thing: apples and crust. But the other ingredients might differ, and so might the outcome." Sloan's study relied on just one of those models, and only a few variables, namely sea ice melt. She didn't factor in land use or population or any of a dozen other things that might impact drought. Her findings seem to reflect what's going on today, she says. But they still don't tell the full story.

To truly understand the California drought, scientists have to understand the global climate system, which has countless weird ticks. The jet stream appears to be slowing down and meandering off-course, giving us both the Triple R and its evil twin, the Terribly Tenacious

**IF THE TRIPLE R
IS THE SUPERVILLAIN,
THE BLOB WOULD BE
ITS MINION.**

Trough (which New Englanders will recall was behind this winter's polar vortex). Then there's the Blob, a massive layer of exceptionally warm water—300 feet deep and 1,000 miles wide—that's settled off the West Coast. Caused by the Triple R, it is exacerbating the drought by warming the air as it heads toward land, reducing the chance for snow or rain even further. If the Triple R is the supervillain behind the drought, the Blob would be its minion.

In February, scientists from Columbia, Cornell, and NASA analyzed various climate models to see what the decades ahead might hold. They found that climate change has increased the likelihood that a "mega-drought"—a *decades-long* period of low precipitation and high evaporation—will consume the western United States sometime in the next 30 years. Again, the studies would seem to have found a smoking gun, but the authors cautioned that their predictions are not carved in stone. Even just one El Niño could alter things dramatically.

And therein lies the rub: No one, not even a scientist with access to some of the most powerful computers in the world, can predict the future with 100 percent certainty. The most they can do is nudge us toward the answers and hope that we make the final connections ourselves, before the water runs out. ☞

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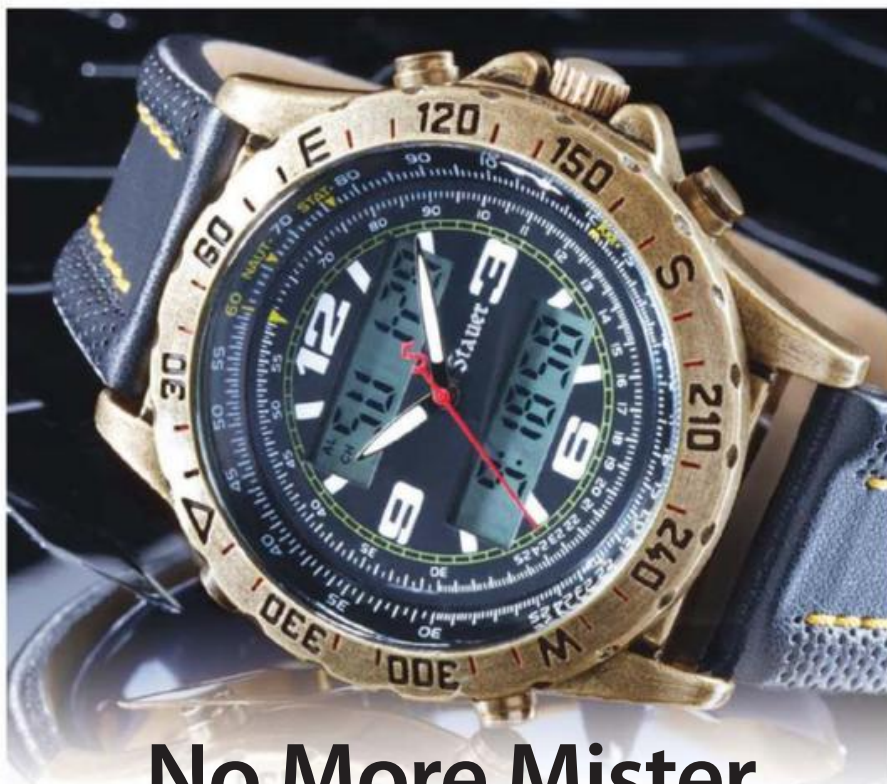
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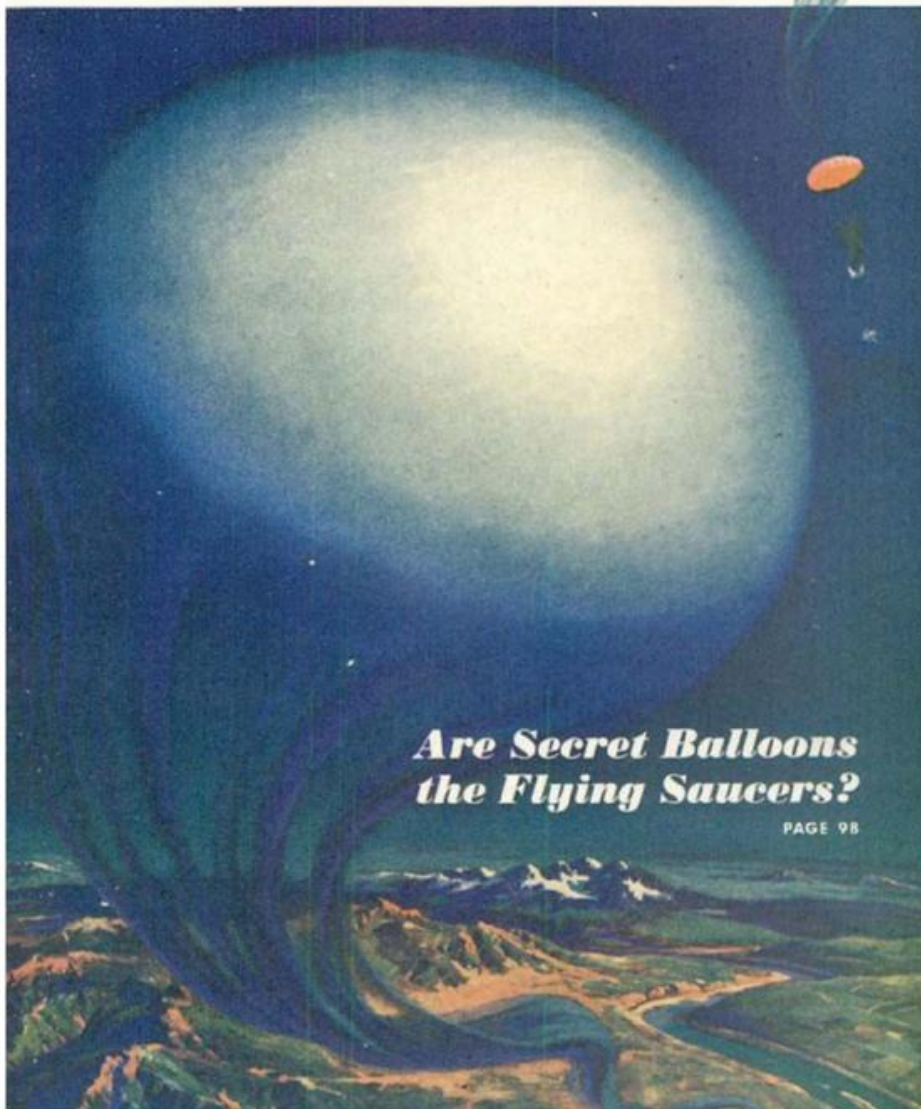
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*Are Secret Balloons
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PAGE 98

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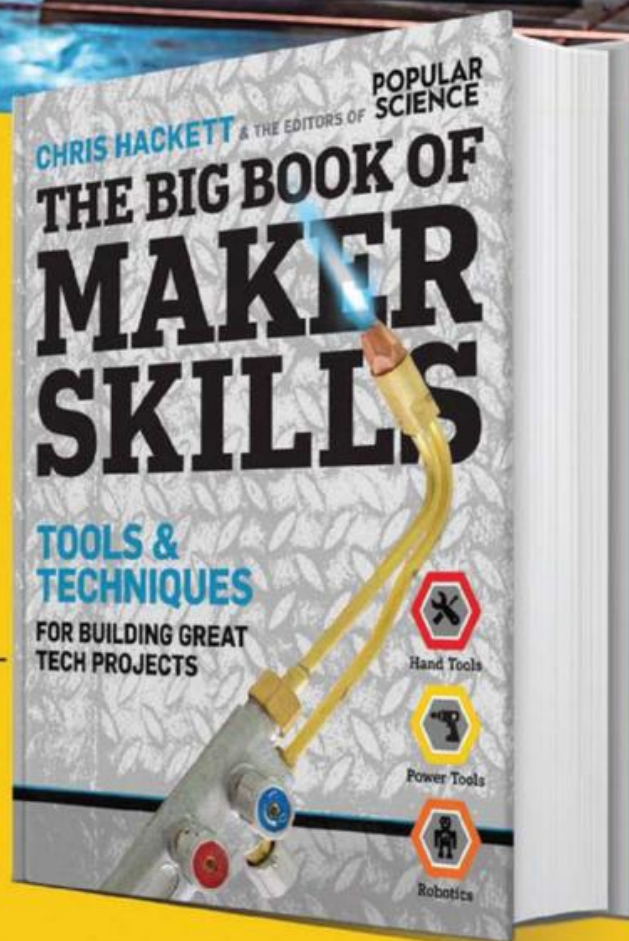


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